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An Analysis of the Unique Characteristics of Russian Cultural Context

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Abstract. The sustainable development of human society is inseparable from the communication, collision and interaction of different ways of thinking. Cultural context is an intuitive summary of a nation's way of thinking. Studying it plays an important role in cross-cultural communication, cooperation and national cultural integration under the background of globalization. Based on American anthropologist Edward T. Hall's high-context and low-context culture theory, this article analyzes the unique characteristics of Russian context culture, and puts forward and further explores the dual composite characteristics of Russian - "moderately high-context" and "direct expression" on the surface. The two coexist dialectically. This article also traces the basic reasons for the formation of these characteristics, which are attributed to Russia's long-term history and cultural traditions, the collective cognitive framework and some unique factors. At the same time, this article also examines the impact of historical background on language evolution and discusses how globalization and social change promote the exchange of languages and cultures of different ethnic groups. Finally, this study clarifies the subtle differences between different cultural backgrounds and provides a theoretical framework and practical strategies for Sino-Russian exchanges, hoping to reduce cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings and strengthen the foundation of trust.

Keywords: High-low context theory, Russian linguistic culture, Dual-composite characteristics, Sino-Russian cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

The study of context culture is an important part of linguistics. The theory of high and low context culture proposed by American anthropologist Edward Hall points out that there are systematic differences in the way of information coding, transmission and decoding in different cultures. This theory is a classic method to study cross-cultural communication. Since its introduction, it has been widely used in the classification of various languages and cultures.

In the field of Russian linguistics, the systematic analysis of Russian context culture is still rare. In the existing research, most of them only classify Russian as high context or low context according to the basic context culture category. But this classification often ignores the complexity of the Russian language itself. On the one hand, Russian is quite direct in daily conversations, with strict grammatical rules, simple forms of address, and clear public slogans - all of which are like the

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characteristics of low-context culture. On the other hand, the proverbs and literary works in Russian, as well as the clear distinction between свои (insiders) and чужие (outsiders) , reveal a deep high-context feature. This paper argues that the context culture of Russian is not purely high context or low context, but has the characteristics of both, which can be summarized as the dialectical unity of "high context core and direct expression". The formation of this dual characteristic has a lot to do with the collective consciousness of Russians, historical trauma, the mutual influence of different cultures, and the long-term tug of war between individual thought and collectivism.

Based on Hall's theory of high and low context culture, combined with specific language use cases and Russian cultural background, this paper analyzes the complex characteristics and causes of Russian context culture, and also discusses the evolution of these characteristics in the context of globalization and social change. The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of Russian language and way of thinking, and to provide some theoretical thinking for cross-cultural communication between China and Russia.

2. Theoretical perspective : The connotation and dimension of high and low context culture

In the process of the development of world linguistics, the study of context is constantly evolving and deepening. On the basis of predecessors, American anthropologist Edward T. Hall further divided the level of context and put forward the concept of high and low cultural context. He pointed out that "any phenomenon can be classified into high, medium and low contexts " [1], and "the level of context determines the nature of all communication activities and is the basis for all subsequent behaviors" [1]. This theory is applicable to the study of various ethnic languages and is widely regarded by linguists as an important analytical tool in the field of linguistics. Therefore, based on this theory, this article adheres to the research idea of the unity of commonality and personality, and analyzes the characteristics and reasons for its cultural background in combination with Russia's unique background.

2.1. High and low context cultural theory

Contextual culture is the external expression of language usage habits and ways of thinking. Understanding and mastering the cultural background of the other party in communication helps to receive and process the information conveyed by the other party more accurately and effectively, and makes it easier for the other party to accept and understand what they express, thus improving the efficiency of communication. In addition, understanding each other's thinking patterns can also establish a deeper cognitive interaction, thus transforming communication from simple information transmission to cultural and emotional integration. Therefore, understanding the background and culture of other countries is very important for daily and international exchanges. The theory of high and low context culture has opened up a new field for context research and provided theoretical support for cross-cultural communication from the perspective of linguistics. Chinese scholar Zhao Qing affirmed the value of high and low context culture research in reducing cultural barriers and promoting international communication in the article "Cross-cultural comparison and communication strategy research of high and low context culture." As a set of universally applicable theories, it is also applicable to the study of Russian cultural context and Sino-Russian international exchanges, and provides an effective theoretical tool for Russian language research and Sino-Russian exchanges.

In his book "Beyond Culture," Hall gives a clear definition of "high context culture" and "low context culture" : "In high context, information is pre-arranged. Information is in the hands of the

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receiver, exists in the background, only a small part of the information itself. In low-context situations, the information itself must contain most of the content to make up for the missing parts of the context (including the internal context and the foreign language context)" [1]. In high-context culture, the speaker usually hides the meaning he wants to express in the discourse. The two parties involved in the communication generally have a common recognized language and cultural background, so they can understand the "implication" in the other party's language. However, in low-context culture, the speaker usually directly says the real intention, and the literal meaning of the discourse is mostly equal to the information he wants to convey.

This difference is not only a matter of language communication, but also essentially reflects the difference between the two cognitive models. Just as Hall compares the legal systems in the high-context culture represented by France and the low-context culture represented by the United States : in the high-context system, the court has greater flexibility in the admissibility of testimony as evidence, and the court pays more attention to the hidden information behind the surface behavior. Because the implicit information in language may far exceed its literal meaning, people with high contextual background can interpret these statements more objectively and accurately according to their own context ; in the low-context society, the common law system represented by the United States makes the trial results vulnerable to the influence of deliberately formed precedents in the past, and the statements of lawyers and witnesses will also have an important impact on the court process. Therefore, judges need to rely on contextual judgment to restore the facts, rather than accept "one-sided words" [1]. Chinese scholars Liu Yudong and Zhou Ying also pointed out in their article "A Comparative Study of Chinese and American High and Low Context Cultures in the Context of Globalization" : "The general characteristics of high and low context cultures are reflected in the differences in the coding of information symbols in communication styles, but what is deeply reflected is the differences in Eastern and Western ways of thinking, behavioral characteristics, especially cultural values." [2] It can be seen that the understanding of high and low context culture cannot only stay in the language itself. Language is a way to express and reflect culture [3], and it is also an extension of human thinking. The essence of language is not the external form, but the logic and thinking mode behind it. The focus of this theory is not "what is said or how to say", but "why to say so". To accurately understand the language characteristics of a nation, we must first understand its cultural cognitive characteristics. Understanding this truth is the basis for correctly applying the theory of high and low context culture, effectively analyzing context and cultural characteristics, and also the premise for understanding the analysis of Russian context cultural characteristics in this paper.

As a unique feature of the use of different national languages, the high and low context culture is influenced by many factors. Many linguists at home and abroad have done extensive and in-depth research on these factors. For example, Chinese scholar Zhao Qing discusses the influence of economic form, language system, historical and geographical environment and ethnic composition on the formation of different contexts. Liu Yudong, Zhou Ying and other scholars also quoted the concept of information symbol coding, and put forward a new definition of high and low context culture from the perspective of cognitive model. At the same time, Russian scholar Leontyev emphasized the influence of consciousness on high and low context culture. The author believes that language, as a way of expressing ideas, is the carrier of consciousness. The thinking mode and consciousness of different ethnic groups lead to their unique language habits to communicate and express their thoughts, thus forming different language use patterns. High and low context culture is based on the classification of these language habits. Further tracing the reasons for the formation of different thinking modes will find that the social environment in which language users are located is

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a key factor. If a group is in a shared social environment for a long time, a relatively unified way of thinking will be formed within the group, and then a common language environment will be generated. In this shared language environment, if the group members want to communicate effectively, they need relatively unified language habits, which further gives birth to the common cultural context of the group. However, the differences in the social environment of different groups determine the differences in their cultural context. On the basis of these differences, linguistics puts forward the concepts of "high" and "low", which makes the cultural environment characteristics of different groups more prominent, thus promoting the formation of the concepts of high context culture and low context culture.

2.2. Comparative examples of high and low context culture

Language is the basic means of human communication, which runs through all aspects of daily life. Therefore, the cultural differences between high and low context are ubiquitous, which can be observed from the different reactions of different groups to the same situation. For example, when expressing different opinions from colleagues in teamwork, people from low-context cultural backgrounds such as the Netherlands and Germany tend to directly express their objections first, then give alternatives through objective and rational analysis, and put their different views in the context of the team's common goals, indicating that "things are not right for people". In this way, they find rationality for their "direct" opposition and also alleviate the conflict. Specifically, they might say: "I believe there are certain issues with Mary's plan. The data shows... which differs from the actual situation. Therefore, I suggest... Here is my preliminary analysis. As for Mary's plan, I think... aspects are worth referencing and can be retained." In contrast, high-context cultures are more subtle, a trait particularly evident in conversations with seniors and superiors. They typically avoid direct, head-on conflict. Instead, they first express appreciation for the other person's perspective, then raise their concerns in the form of questions or requests for guidance. They may even avoid pointing out issues in public, opting instead to address them privately, and often use vague, tactful phrases such as "Could it be that…?" "Is it possible that…" or "In my personal opinion…" In the same scenario described earlier in the low-context culture, they might say, "Mar's proposal is very well thought out, especially… it has given me a lot of inspiration. I might not have fully understood one small thing about... I would appreciate your help with that... In the same way, classic American literature often has characters who tell someone directly that they love them. For example, Scarlett tells Ashley directly and possessively, "I love you" in *Gone with the Wind*. I've always cared about you. "I've never loved anyone else [4]." Catherine goes even further in *Wuthering Heights* by saying that her love for Heathcliff is a part of who she is and using strong words to show how she feels: "I am Heathcliff! He will always be in my heart, not because he is good-looking, but because he is more like me than I am." [5] Writers in Japanese and classical Chinese literature often use poetic language to show love in a roundabout way, which is a very nice way to do it. In *The Tale of Genji*, love is shown through the giving and receiving of waka poems, colours (clothes), smells, and very small actions. For example, Kashiwagi, very sick because of his love for the third princess. He can only express his concern for her with a fragrance and a song full of regret. Until he died, he never told anyone how he felt [6]. Similar situations are common in social etiquette, business negotiations and other fields. These comparisons help to clearly show the differences between high and low cultural backgrounds, enhance the understanding of their definitions and classification criteria, and thus better grasp their concepts and characteristics.

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2.3. High- and low-context cultures are not absolute

The difference between "high" and "low" is not absolute, but relative. For example, in daily communication, low-context expression may appear in high-context culture, and vice versa.

The relationship between high-context culture and low-context culture is shown in Figure 1. For example, in China's relatively high-context culture, we sometimes express our views directly; using a popular Internet term, which is called "speaking directly". Expressed in Internet language: "What do you mean? - literal meaning". On the other hand, when judging the cultural background characteristics of a specific region or group, it cannot be limited to the two criteria of "high" and "low"; as shown in Figure 2, there are also different degrees of tendencies between these two extremes. The judgement of the level of cultural environment should be based on groups rather than personal habits, holistic phenomena rather than isolated phenomena, and long-term characteristics rather than short-term language trends. Therefore, in addition to the typical low-cultural language environment represented by the United States and the typical high-cultural language environment represented by China, the language and cultural environment of some countries cannot be completely classified as high culture or low culture. Although they tend to be one end as a whole, in some cases they also show the characteristics of the other end.

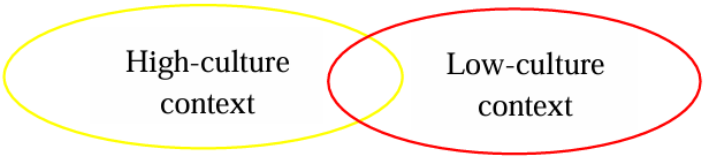

Figure 1. The relationship between high- and low-culture contexts

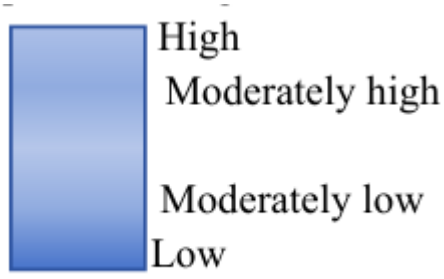

Figure 2. The classification of cultural context levels

Secondly, high- and low-context cultures are dynamic and evolving, not absolute or static. This is particularly evident in today's globalised world. Globalised exchange and mutual learning lead to cultural collision and integration. As language serves as a vehicle and reflection of culture [3], it too undergoes corresponding changes. Chinese scholars Liu Yudong and Zhou Ying have pointed out that, in the context of globalisation, the collision and exchange between various ethnic cultures foster a trend of cultural convergence, where different races or ethnic groups develop mutual understanding and incorporate each other's cultural traditions. This, in turn, gives rise to "shared knowledge" [2] between communicators in discourse. Building on the preceding discussion, a shared cultural consciousness is one of the foundations for the formation of a group's cultural context. Therefore, globalisation encompasses the globalisation of cultural contexts, thereby driving the development and transformation of cultural contexts across different nations and ethnic groups.

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3. The dual-composite characteristics of Russian cultural context

Does the Russian language belong to a high-context culture or a low-context culture? This issue has been the subject of considerable debate in academic circles, and no consensus has yet been reached. However, based on an analysis of the language usage habits of Russian speakers, the author argues that Russian is not a typical high- or low-context culture but rather has dual-composite characteristics. Its core characteristic can be summarised as the coexistence and dialectical unity of a "high-context core and direct expression", with directness being one of its most distinctive features.

3.1. Directness in the Russian language

3.1.1. Manifestations of directness

First and foremost, it must be emphasised that this paper defines directness as the clear and unambiguous expression of the speaker's true intentions—a distinctive feature of discourse. Discourse is just a linguistic sign that stores information. But context is more than just a setting for the intuitive presentation of meaning. It also includes everything in the environment and background that gives discourse meaning. It is the framework for decoding. Consequently, it is not possible to ascertain that Russia is characterised by a low-context culture solely based on the directness of the Russian language.

The directness of Russian language can be described as follows: Russian grammar requires strict agreement in gender, number and case, and clearly distinguishes verb aspects. These features directly reflect speaker's logical intent. Thus, in the sentence "*Я рисую картину*(I draw a picture) "one can know directly from the personal pronoun and the case of the noun that "*Я*" (I) is the doer of the action and the subject, and "*картину* (picture)" is the receiver of the action and the object. The verb "*рисую*(draw)" is imperfective, which directly shows that the action is happening now, or happens regularly and repeatedly. Similarly, in "*Я рисовала картину*(I drew a picture)", the verb *"рисовала* (drew)" is in the feminine imperfect past tense, directly indicating that the action took place in the past and was performed by a female.In contrast, in the sentence "*Я нарисовала картину* (I have drawn a picture)", the verb "*нарисовала* (have drawn)" is in the feminine perfect past tense, directly indicating that the action has been completed and was performed by a female. The exact expression of these grammatical structures externalises the speaker's logical directness and incarnates the directness of the Russian linguistic forms.

Directness in language of communication. Social language use is quite complex. Meanwhile, the present trend of globalisation has greatly promoted the cross-cultural communication, which is the mutual influence and integration of cultures with different status levels. However, the directness of the Russian language is well preserved in polite expressions, in particular in the way of addressing interlocutors. For example, the use of "*ты* (you)" directly indicates that the addressee is younger, of equal rank, or subordinate to the speaker, while *"вы*(you)" is generally used when addressing elders or superiors. More obvious is the use of names: for example, the nickname "*Сережа*" conveys affection and is typically used for juniors, while the full name with the patronymic "*СергейАлександрович*" expresses respect and is typically used for seniors or superiors... These forms of address directly reflect the relationship between the communicating parties and can even be used to infer the speaker's attitude to the person addressed. This is one of the demonstrations of the directness of Russian. Moreover, the phrase "*честно говоря* (to be honest)" is widely used in conversational speech. This leads us to conclude that Russians view frank advice as an expression of

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sincerity in interpersonal relationships. They hope to demonstrate their sincerity to others through direct speech, thus establishing mutual trust.

The directness of public language is mainly to be seen in expressions addressed to the general public such as advertising slogans and social mottos. For example, the law requires that cigarette packages shall display health warnings in text and images, pointing directly to the diseases that may be caused by smoking and showing images of the bodily changes associated with these diseases (as illustrated in Figure 3 to remind smokers to pay attention to their health. This is a much more direct approach than the Chinese slogan "Smoking is harmful to health."

(a) (b)

Figure 3. Russian cigarette warning: Smoking may cause diseases

3.1.2. The reasons behind directness

When we know the features of the Russian language, it helps us to communicate better with the Russians. But if we want to achieve a deeper understanding of the Russian way of thinking, then we must consider the thinking logic which underlies the formation of this linguistic habit, i.e., the reason for directness. In this article, the two main reasons for the directness of Russian are further explored from the perspective of the communicative goals of language users and the uniqueness of Russians: avoiding misunderstandings and national character.

On the one hand, starting from linguistic features of expressing thoughts and opinions directly in Russian, we can conclude that one of the main reasons for the formation of Russian directness is to avoid misunderstandings. It can avoid omission and distortion of information in a way that allows one to express all the information they want to express through language in an intuitive way that does not require the listener to interpret hidden "subtext", it can prevent the omission and distortion of information.

Being direct can help you avoid misunderstandings in many situations, especially when you're writing or speaking formally, as in official documents, notices, news reports, and interviews. That said, it's important to remember that the reason for using direct language is to make information easier to understand by minimising ambiguity, and thus the risk of misunderstanding. But, in complex intercultural communication, this goal is not always achieved due to the great differences between languages in terms of context and culture. Consider the case of Khrushchev. During the Cold War in 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev told Western diplomats at the Polish Embassy in Moscow, "*Мы вас похороним!*" The Russian phrase is often translated as "We will outlive you and see you die," but some in the West have translated it as "We will bury you!" Khrushchev had originally meant to imply that socialism would put an end to capitalism. Some Western countries,

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intentionally or unintentionally, took advantage of the fact that the two languages were not as frank as they could have been, leading to a misunderstanding that the Soviet Union wanted to destroy the West by force. Khrushchev later explained what he meant, but some Western politicians deliberately exploited the incident to confuse public opinion which also added to the public's misunderstanding of this statement. This case is a good example of the "high-context core" in Russian. Even clear statements require a common cultural and political background on both sides in order to understand the real meaning of them. Without this shared cultural background or when language is manipulated deliberately, the "directness" of "insiders" loses all meaning and can even lead to misunderstandings. Thus, the direct expression of the thought can prevent misunderstanding. However, sometimes objective factors prevent it from performing this function. Particular meanings cannot be easily conveyed in particular cultural contexts because of translation errors, as well as differences in cultural understanding of the same direct expression. This results in multiple interpretations. On the other hand, subjective factors can also affect the effectiveness of language. These include the complex relationships between the communicators. In Russian international diplomacy a direct statement may be deliberately distorted to imply something vague, or even the opposite. These objective and subjective factors may make the "directness" lose its function of intuitive expression, and discourse is mixed with superfluous information and conveys the information that is contrary to the speaker's true intention.

The connotation of direct language is generally simple and clear, which directly covers the main point that the speaker wants to convey; this article is called "single-path information acquisition". However, through the above analysis, in the communication process, when this path appears in different linguistic thinking and contexts, the original information is easy to be mixed with other meanings, or even the original clear path is blurred, so as to cause deviations in meaning, that is, ambiguity, causing confusion to the communication recipient. To receive information correctly and avoid misunderstanding, people must be careful to consider and discern the information hidden beneath the literal meaning. This is also one of the main reasons why this article is against judging low-context cultures by directness.

On the other hand, language is the external expression of thought, and the uniqueness of a nation's thinking is determined by the unique national character traits of a nation, thus forming the uniqueness of its national language. As Chinese scholar Zhao Rong said: "Language is the carrier of national character; language can be used to objectively analyse the primary characteristics of a nation's character." [7] One important feature of the Russian language is directness, which is influenced by the Russian national character.

There has been extensive research both domestically and internationally on the characteristics of the Russian national character, and the definition of its extremism is a consensus reached by nearly all studies. The religious philosopher Berdyaev (Н.А. Бердяев) once said, "The Russian people can only be compared to European nations in terms of polarity and contradiction; they are a more straightforward and inspired people who do not understand method but prefer extremes." [8] In his book *Interpreting Russia*, academician D.S. Likhachev also said, "The Russian people are a nation that swings quickly and suddenly from one extreme to another; therefore, it is a nation whose history is unpredictable." [9] This tendency towards extremes is a simple and direct way of thinking: it starts with two very different situations and often leaves out the middle ground between them. The Russian people are very direct and strong-willed because they think in this unique way.

Russians also value being honest and open with other people because they think these are important traits for building trust. Russian phrases that show honesty include "*Честно говоря*", "*По правде говоря*", "*Если честно*", and "*Откровенно (говоря)*". Phrases that show emotions directly,

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like "*К сожалению / К счастью / К ужасу / К восторгу*", also show how Russians like to be open and honest with each other. These examples further illustrate the directness of Russian. In a low-context culture, this external directness does not exist in isolation; rather, it is fundamentally rooted in the Russian people's profound moderately high-context cultural heritage. The following analysis will look into this more closely.

3.2. Russian as a moderately high-context language

Russian is neither a typical high-context culture nor a low-context culture. In Russian expression, both types of context are used quite extensively. However, taking into account Russians' linguistic habits—which extend beyond everyday communication to include proverbs, literary and artistic works—as well as their deeply ingrained linguistic logic and expressive conventions, the author argues that Russian belongs to a moderately high-context culture that also exhibits characteristics of a low-context culture.

3.2.1. Manifestations of a moderately high-context culture

This article proceeds from the simple to the complex, first examining proverbs commonly found in everyday Russian life, then analysing literary and artistic works of a more speculative and philosophical nature, and finally exploring the foundations of the cultural context—namely, the logic underlying patterns of thought or linguistic expression—in order to explain why the author classifies Russian as a moderately high-context culture.

3.2.1.1. Russian proverbs

Russian proverbs and colloquial expressions often draw on everyday phenomena to convey profound ideas; they contain philosophical wisdom and offer insights, warnings and other lessons. Scholar V.I. Dal once defined proverbs as "highly educational condensed fables", pointing out that they indirectly reflect functions such as judgment, evaluation, and teaching, and believed that proverbs usually have both surface and deep meanings [10]. O. Shirokova holds a similar view. She believes that an important criterion for judging proverbs is their figurativeness [11]. V.P. Zhukov, building on her theory, further proposed that proverbs are complete, concise sentences that either have both a literal and figurative meaning or only a figurative meaning [12]. Therefore, it is clear that Russian proverbs hide more information beneath their surface meaning, and effective understanding and communication are achieved by both parties based on a shared cultural background, which conforms to the characteristics of high-context cultures. The following are several classic examples:

Russian Proverb: *Дорого яичко к великому дню.*

Surface Meaning: Red eggs should be given in time for Easter.

Deep Meaning: It is gratifying to offer help when others need it; good deeds should be done in a timely manner.

Russian Proverb: *Чем черт не шутит пока бог спит.*

Surface Meaning: When God is asleep, the devil will stop at nothing to play tricks.

Deep Meaning: Anything is possible.

Russian Proverb: *Без копейки рубля не живет.*

Literal Meaning: Without a kopeck, there is no ruble.

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Deeper Meaning: Little by little, one accumulates wealth; one must focus on saving and not rush for quick results.

Russian Proverb: *В Тулу со своим самоваром не ездят.*

Surface Meaning: Don't bring your own samovar to Tula.

Deep Meaning: Don't do things unnecessarily.

The vehicle of the speaker's thought is the literal explanation of these proverbs, that is, the surface meaning. But the understanding of the real meaning of a proverb cannot be separated from the common ideology, common sense and cultural identity between both sides. Therefore, when Russians use proverbs in communication, it is necessary to apply one's own world knowledge to understand the deeper meaning below the literal text in order to fully understand the information provided by the other party. This is also one of the main reasons why Russian is considered to be a moderately high-context culture, which is highly dependent on context.

3.2.1.2. Literary and artistic works

Russian literature and art are part of Russian culture. The creative ideas of the works are important material for the study of the Russian national mindset. Everybody knows that Russian literature is full of thought and feeling. A lot of works use techniques like metaphors, symbolism. The social currents are embodied in the minds of individual characters, the spirit of the times is manifested in the personal destinies. This leads to deep and complex ideological meanings being hidden under the surface of the text. In order to understand the author's purpose, it is necessary to understand the cultural background knowledge firstly, and analyse the deeper meanings in simple images. For example, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's (Ф.М. Достоевский) novel Crime and Punishment, Sonia's cross to Raskolnikov is sacrifice, atonement and transmission of faith. The gospel of Raskolnikov's Siberian kiss is his rebirth. In his long poem Twelve People, Blok (A.A. Blok) used the blizzard that followed the October Revolution as a metaphor for the revolutionary forces that destroyed the old world. He also compared the twelve Red Guards to the twelve disciples of Jesus, revealing the duality of violence and holiness in the revolution. In Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, the very orchard stands for the old era, and the entangled fates of the main characters represent the ideological conflicts of a society in transition. They illustrate the conflict between various social classes and their respective ideologies in the passage from the old society to the new society. There are many such literary and artistic works in the history of Russian literature and art. It is a fact that they were created by different authors in different periods and belong to different genres, but they all fully prove that many Russian national writers are accustomed to hiding rich thoughts and emotions under the surface of the text and pursuing the "beauty of subtlety". The wide distribution and lasting popularity of these works also testify to the Russian people's comprehension and appreciation of this creative idea. Thus, we can see the Russian people's mastery and identification with moderately high-context culture.

3.2.1.3. свои and чужие

Russians have a very strong collective identity and they make a clear distinction between "свои" (insiders) and "чужие" (outsiders) both emotionally and cognitively. This is reflected in their sociocultural behaviour. For example, Russians do not smile easily in front of strangers, because they regard a smile as a precious and sincere expression of personal emotion; so, in dealing with outsiders, they often seem "stingy" with smiles. In contrast, in the typically low-context culture of the United States, social smiles are a common form of interaction with others and do not necessarily

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indicate genuine closeness. This difference between the Russians on the one hand, and on the other hand, their strong cultural and psychological identity within their own group, is a significant feature of a high context culture. On the other hand, it also indicates that when making friends in Russia, the most important thing is not to quickly prove yourself but to respect these boundaries and wait for insiders to invite you into the "inner circle".

In high-context society the difference between "*свои*" and "*чужие*" defines a person's identity. It also explains why people in this society have two different ways of expressing themselves: with "*свои*" they can employ "direct expressions" based on deep trust between them. With "*чужие*" they may be more careful, keep their distance or even be silent. These are all methods used by a moderately high context culture to safeguard its internal information. This attitude of distinguishing *"свои*" from "*чужие*" is making Russian linguistic thinking in communication somewhat high-context. In particular, the interaction of the "*Круг своих*(circle of insiders)" is determined by the common knowledge background. One must be aware of the knowledge that is taken for granted by insiders and use it in communication with them. Otherwise one can find oneself in situations where a Russian's lack of laughter is interpreted as coldness.

3.2.2. Causes of the formation of a moderately high-context culture

In the theoretical foundation section of this paper, a conceptual analysis of the causes behind the formation of high- and low-context cultures has already been conducted, which applies to the cultural contexts of all languages. However, in order to further grasp the formation mechanism of Russia's unique cultural background, it is necessary to consider the unique background factors of the Russian nationality. This article, starting from the background formation mechanism and combining the general patterns of high- and low-context cultures discussed earlier, specifically analyzes the formation of Russian moderately high-context culture from the aspects of collective consciousness and historical culture.

Starting from the basic logic formed by language habits, the balance and confrontation between individual consciousness and collective consciousness in national concepts play an important role in shaping a country's high-context or low-context cultural tendencies, and are key factors in studying the cultural context of Russia. Chinese scholar Ju Yunsheng has previously posited in *A Study of Language Consciousness from the Perspective of Russian Psycholinguistics* that consciousness impacts language [13]. Strong collective consciousness promotes the formation of common thinking patterns and cultural knowledge among members of the group, creating a favorable environment for the development of a high-context culture.

The Russian people's collectivist spirit has deep historical roots and is firmly entrenched, shaped by religious culture and politics. In their book "Congregation" and the Theory and Practice of Russian Political Ethics, scholars Wu Huixin and Liu Yutong offered an in-depth examination of the significant influence exerted by the village community traditions of the Russian people and the evolution of Orthodox Christianity on the establishment and fortification of collective consciousness [14]. Scholars Yang Jie and Li Chuanxun have also pointed out that Russian national consciousness doesn't put enough emphasis on personal values and individual freedom [15]. Moreover, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in his essay *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium* that collective endeavours have perpetually held greater significance than individual pursuits in Russia; the collective lifestyle has historically prevailed in Russian society, and the erosion of this tradition has been remarkably gradual [16].

It is exactly for this reason that the long-standing collective consciousness of the Russian people has made them develop a unique and independent way of thinking within the group, a thinking

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pattern that determines their distinctive language habits. The speaker does not need to spell out his meaning in discourse, because of the shared cultural knowledge and psychological identification within the group. Instead, people use this "tacit understanding" to interpret the meaning of words, which is exactly what makes the language of moderately high-context cultures unique.

This common consciousness is associated with the deep cultural traditions created by the Russian people through long-term historical contacts. A long history promotes the interaction and idea exchange between people from different cultures, which contributes to the formation of a shared culture and provides a basis for the development of a moderately high-context culture. In *A Study on Cross-Cultural Comparison and Communication Strategies between High-Context and Low-Context Cultures*, scholar Zhao Qing pointed out that a long history and culture make people in a country share a lot of cultural resources in the process of interaction [17]. Russia has a long history and rich cultural heritage; thus, its high-context culture is closely related to its historical and cultural background. In the paper *A Semantic Analysis of Discourse Terms in Russian National Psychological Vocabulary*, Chinese scholar Chu Min pointed out that the Russian people have their own psychological keywords, which are unique to the nationality and used to express their emotions. It is a good illustration of the way in which a common history and culture create the cultural context of the Russian language [18].

Not every country with a long history will have a high or moderately high-context culture, of course. The development of the moderately high-context culture in Russia is linked to its long history and cultural identity, but it also depends on the specific path of development and the actual content of its shared culture over that time.

The historical evolution of the Russian nation has been convoluted and transformative, characterised by the effects of "collective trauma". From the cultural rift caused by Peter the Great's Westernisation reforms to the deep-seated social contradictions that built up under serfdom; from the yoke of Mongol rule to times of upheaval and on to the wars, revolutions, and systemic upheavals of the twentieth century—this turbulent social backdrop led the Russian people to feel more connected to and like they belonged to their "in-group", while also creating a subtle and hidden system of discursive protection to avoid the possible threats of open speech. For example, in *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov (М.А. Булгаков) used the metaphors and symbols of magical realism to show how people were cut off from each other under Stalin's harsh rule. On the other hand, it was precisely the history of collective oppression, and the distorted socio-cultural context of the time, that made it possible for the Russian people to grasp the deeper meaning of this work.

3.3. The dialectical unity of Russian's dual composite characteristics

3.3.1. The dialectical unity between composite characteristics

The dual and composite characteristics of Russia, the coexistence of "direct expression and moderately high-context culture" is not the coexistence of two completely opposite linguistic features, but two parts of a dialectically unified organic whole. In the practice of the Russian language these two features complement each other and strengthen each other, creating a specific Russian cultural context. Russian directness is not the same as in low-context cultures, where all intended information is expressed directly through language, but rather should be understood as candour within a moderately high-context framework. This helps the communicators to better state their key points, more openly and honestly, and to use their shared cultural background to cut down on redundant information. At the same time, in Russian communication, even if the other side uses direct language, a correct understanding of the meaning of their words cannot be separated from the

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shared thinking and speaking patterns of the moderately high-context culture group. This two-layered cultural environment allows Russians in their own environment to express their thoughts and feelings freely on the basis of common culture, mutual understanding and acceptance. This direction is a feeling of trust and intimacy that is unique in a moderate high context. It also provides a way for their community to share information quickly and directly. The special communication patterns in the Russian community show the distinctive charm of the Russian language, which can move people and make them think, and make Russian contextual culture different from other contextual cultures.

3.3.2. The causes of the dual-composite characteristics

In order to explore the reasons of the dual-composite features of Russian cultural context, it is necessary to consider both universality and particularity. We must start from the general laws of formation of cultural situations, but we must also take into account such particular factors as the historical development, geographical environment, social structure and cultural psychology of Russia. We must see the whole and the parts together, and we must, moreover. The whole is the general features of the Russian cultural situation, the coexistence of "direct expression" and "moderately high-context culture", and the parts are the two components, "directness" and "moderately high-context core". The main reasons of these two characteristics have been discussed in the previous sections respectively. Next, from the perspective of these two overall components, we will explore the unique factors in the formation of the Russian cultural situation.

3.3.2.1. The interaction of diverse cultures

Russia spans the Eurasian continent and has a long history. Therefore, the Russian language has continuously developed through long-term interactions and integration with different cultures, possessing the conditions to form dual composite characteristics.

A review of the civilisational history of the region where Russia is situated reveals that it has always been accompanied by deep interaction with diverse civilisations. From the pursuit of seeing the essence through phenomena, transmitted after Orthodox Christianity permeated Russian culture, to the veiled expressions driven by Eastern culture and high-pressure rule during the Mongol-Tatar period, and further to the Western rationalist pursuit of clear and precise logical expression in language following Peter the Great's Westernisation reforms... The Russian language has sought balance through successive transformations to adapt to developmental needs, providing a crucial contextual foundation for the formation of its moderately highly context-dependent and direct communicative characteristics.

3.3.2.2. The conflict and balance between collective and individual consciousness

As mentioned earlier, the village community traditions of the tribal era and the unifying ideals of Orthodox Christianity have jointly shaped the Russian nations strong collective identity. However, this shared consciousness cannot prevent people from expressing the need for individual will. When the social order begins to collapse, some people start to question the group's way of life and bring new ideas into the community. The departure of these people destabilises collective consciousness; the original values and ways of thinking of group members are disrupted, and new ideas are incorporated into the cultural context.

In Russian history, there have been many people with awakened consciousness and critical thinking. From A.H. Radyshchev to A.I. Herzen. From F.M. Dostoevsky to A.I. Solzhenitsyn. Most

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of these individuals dared to express their thoughts directly and question established ideas. Whether their mode of expression was direct or indirect, they acted out of concern for collective interests while also seeking better ways for personal growth. This has made the Russian language carry a profound collective memory while also conveying a distinct personal will, creating a dialectical unity between delicacy and frankness.

4. Trends and causes of cultural contextual changes in contemporary Russia

Given the non-absolute nature of high- and low-context cultures, cultural context is dynamic rather than static and is characterised by mutual influence rather than isolation. This paper examines the trends and causes of cultural contextual changes in Russia from two perspectives: external international factors and internal social factors.

4.1. The impact of globalization trends

The development of globalisation in the modern era has deepened interactions among nations, leading to changes in national languages through diverse interactions and driving cultural context toward greater diversity and inclusivity. For example, English words such as "computer" and "Internet" are widely used in the United States, the United Kingdom, and European countries. Their corresponding Russian terms, "*компьютер*" (computer) and "*интернет*" (Internet), as well as the Arabic terms "كومبيوتر (computer)" and "إنترنت (Internet)", share remarkably similar pronunciations. Similar examples are quite common in Russian, such as "*кофе* (coffee)", "*какао* (cocoa)", and "*софа*(sofa)". However, the influence of vocabulary represents only the most basic level of linguistic evolution in the context of globalised communication; deeper-level disparities can lead to changes in linguistic thinking, which in turn affect the characteristics of cultural context. Scholars both in China and abroad have paid attention to this phenomenon and conducted relevant research. In their article "A Comparative Study of High- and Low-Context Cultures in China and the United States in the Context of Globalisation", Chinese scholars Liu Yudong and Zhou Ying proposed the view that globalisation drives cultural exchange and integration, causing relatively high-context (or low-context) cultures to shift toward low-context (or high-context) cultures [2]. In her article "The Dissemination of Chinese Films in Russia in a Context of Cultural Symbiosis", scholar Lü Li cited the following example from Sino-Russian film exchanges: When enthusiasts discuss *The Wandering Earth*, they might say, "There are countless roads, but safety comes first." At first glance, this seems like a direct reminder to be careful while driving. However, the emotional exchange that comes from watching the same work and the broader meaning of the word "road" can be seen as a pattern of high-context cultural communication [19]. The famous line "If fate is unfair, fight it to the end *(Если судьба несправедлива, сражайся с ней до конца)*" from the Chinese animated movie *Ne Zha: The Demon Boy's Sea Adventure*, which was a hit in 2025, was released in Russia. It not only encourages people to keep going and take on challenges, but it also conveys the Chinese spirit of self-reliance and relentless striving, creating a deep spiritual connection that goes beyond the surface meanings of the words.

Russia has a lot of multiethnic linguistic resources that make Russian expression richer. These resources are spread across the Eurasian continent. Also, because of globalisation, Russia and other parts of the world are communicating and trading with each other more often. The exchange and collision of thought patterns that happen during cultural exchange have allowed the Russian language to keep its unique mix of "high linguistic density and direct expression" while also taking on features from other languages, making it more flexible and complex.

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Also, with the world becoming more complicated and conservative ideas becoming more popular, the competition between the US and Russia in the international media has become more intense and political. Even though the U.S. In this competition, Russian media don't often use the word "ideology" directly, but their interactions are full of the tension of ideological rivalry. Russia has been combining domestic and international media resources, building platforms for external communication, and tightening government control over the media since the start of the new century. Russia's RT television is an example of a media outlet that often follows the journalistic rule of "providing alternative perspectives" in its reporting. They are in a competition with the US and other Western countries over how accurate each other's media coverage is, trying to end Russia's long-standing lack of voice and passive role in the world of public opinion [20]. As a result, the language of Russian media has become more varied and complex. In the context of ideological competition, it is subtle yet direct, full of meaning, and you need to know a little about politics and society to fully understand it. With communication channels becoming more varied, media language is no longer limited to traditional media reporting. The rise of social networks has made media language a big part of everyday life, which has changed the culture as a whole.

4.2. The impact of social transformation trends

Changes in the linguistic context are caused by both internal and external factors. The changes in the linguistic context of the Russian language have been caused by both globalisation and changes in Russian society itself. The development of Russia's moderately high-context linguistic culture is intrinsically linked to its entrenched collectivism and enduring, cohesive ideology. But as Russia moves from a Soviet-style economy to a market economy and a society with many different groups, its collectivist culture is slowly changing to individualism, and its strong ideology is becoming more diverse and broken up. These major changes in social structure and value systems have directly changed how Russians communicate, what they value, and how they express their culture, causing a big shift from a moderately high-context culture to a "mixed high-low context" culture.

The changes in mass media, especially in films, TV shows, and books, have been the most noticeable. Since the 1990s, when Russian social values began to modernise, the literary scene has had many different streams going on at the same time. These streams have brought new themes and styles, and the state's ideological influence has become less strong. Subcultures and multi-tiered cultural spaces became more important in the 21st century. The changes in the world of literature show the trend towards a more open and diverse cultural setting.

In *Rhetorical Criticism of Russian Media Discourse Construction in the Context of Social Transformation*, Chinese scholar Lin Hai says that changes in society affect how the media talks about things. By raising the level of discursive expression, media become more convincing and draw in more people [21]. The media's roles as communicators and guides have a big effect on the overall cultural context of society. On the other hand, changes in Russian cultural context are closely linked to changes in society. For example, after the crisis of the late 1980s, Russian cinema went through a period of change in the 1990s. Changes in political systems led to changes in how films are made. The old centralised system fell apart. Producers had more freedom to make films, distributors had more freedom to choose which films to distribute, and the whole industry adopted the idea of "creative freedom". Along with the huge number of Hollywood movies, the values conveyed by cinema gradually diverged from the perceptions long held by audiences... Many talented screenwriters and directors shifted their focus towards "self-expression" [22]. A nihilistic and critical worldview continued to be the prevailing value in cinematic productions until the early

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21st century. There is a clear divide between "mainstream cinema" and "auteur cinema" in the Russian film industry today, with each style having its own way of telling stories.

The so-called "context" refers to the linguistic environment, which is an integral part of the social environment, interacting with and influencing each another. Every social transformation in Russia has provided an opportunity for changes in cultural context, confirming its dynamic developmental trajectory.

5. Practical implications: Reflections on Sino-Russian exchange strategies based on Russian language and culture

Russia is an important strategic partner of China and a major market of Chinese cultural products. Language is an important way of cultural communication and a major way of expressing ideas. People use language to communicate and to share their thoughts and feelings with each other. In the present trend of globalisation different languages and cultures are developing and changing very fast. In order to better adapt to the trend of world development, China must understand the main characteristics and development trends of the Russian language and Russian culture, so as to lay a solid foundation for forming a more efficient and stronger cooperation mechanism between the two sides.

In terms of interpersonal communication, we need to understand the thinking and expression habits of Russians and grasp the directness of the Russian language and its cultural characteristics of a moderately high-context style so that in communicating with Russians, the other party can efficiently and accurately understand the true intentions. In addition, while considering the dynamic development trends of the Russian language context, we should also consider whether these new features have matured and been widely accepted. In short, we must efficiently convey ideas generated by Chinese thinking through the minds of Russians, minimising information loss as much as possible. Take the 2025 Chinese animated film *Ne Zha: The Demon Boy's Mind* as an example. When released in Russia, it was translated as **Нэчжа побеждает Царя драконов** (Ne Zha Defeats the Dragon King). The Russian synopsis eliminates cultural references (e.g., the "sea-stirring" allusion) and states the outcome directly, which aligns with Russian directness. This adaptation illustrates how Russian contextual culture actively reshapes foreign content to fit its "directness" principle. And the synopsis when the movie was released in China is: "After the disaster, the souls of Nezha and Ao Bing are preserved, but their bodies will soon decompose. Master Taiyi plans to use the Seven-Colored Lotus to reconstruct their bodies. However, many difficulties arise during the process of rebuilding their bodies. What will happen to the fate of Nezha and Ao Bing?" The synopsis on the Russian website KINOPOISK (КИНОПОИСК) reads: "*Наделенный неконтролируемой силой озорной и весёлый мальчишка Нэчжа, чтобы спасти своих родителей и друзей, отправляется в грандиозное и полное приключений путешествие по волшебным мирам. Любовь к семье, мудрый, но непутёвый наставник и вера в крепкую дружбу помогают ему преодолеть испытания на своём пути* (Possessing uncontrollable power, the mischievous and cheerful Nezha embarks on a grand adventure through magical worlds to save his parents and friends. Love for his family, a wise but useless mentor, and faith in strong friendship help him overcome the trials on his path.)" The Russian version is easier to understand and doesn't have any suspense, which the Chinese version does. It makes it easier to understand by removing cultural knowledge barriers on one side, and it directly describes the main character's personality and the end of the story on the other. This is in line with how Russian people think and talk. This translation strategy means "dimension-reducing" and changing the Chinese cultural content that is very high-context so that Russian audiences can understand it better by using Russian "directness".

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This is a clear example of how the "directness" of the Russian language works in cross-cultural communication. It also shows that Russians don't just accept foreign cultures; they actively change based on their core principle of "directness". This is a small example of how globalisation is quickly changing the way people live in different cultures.

Compared to people-to-people exchanges, official exchanges between China and Russia are more heavily influenced by political factors and require more rigorous and flexible handling. Therefore, while considering Russia's understanding and acceptance of certain expressions, it is also necessary to fully take into account China's stance and the interpretations of other countries internationally to avoid diplomatic blunders such as the aforementioned "*Мы вас похороним*!" incident. For instance, on December 1, 2025, Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui, while attending the international academic conference "The United Nations and a Just Multipolar World" at Moscow State University, pointed out that in the face of a turbulent and changing world, China has always stood firmly on the right side of history, promoting an equal and orderly multipolar world and inclusive economic globalisation and providing the world with more new opportunities and positive energy through China's high-quality development and high-level opening-up [23]. The expression "the side that is historically correct" in this sentence cleverly indicates China's diplomatic stance of upholding fairness and justice while directly revealing China's determination to participate in and promote globalisation. The meaning of this sentence is clear and explicit in both Chinese and Russian cultural contexts, leaving no room for misunderstanding by other countries, safeguarding the common interests of China and Russia, and serving as a model of official communication.

6. Conclusion

The Russian cultural context is the cultural imprint of the Russian nation and also serves as an intellectual bridge connecting Russia with the world. As Edward Twitchell Hall Jr. noted in his book *Beyond Culture*, whether in daily interactions or cross-border cooperation, understanding the context familiar to the other party is a key driver of effective communication [1]. Only by mastering its inherent principles can China build a solid bridge for Sino-Russian exchanges in the process of globalisation and achieve the strategic goal of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes.

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