Research article

Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions from linguistic and cultural perspectives

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A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions based on the empirical, questionnaire-based approach. As the preliminary stage of a large-scale study devoted to revealing mutual representations of the Russian and Vietnamese people, ethnic *portraits* and *self-portraits* were compiled based on the linguistic data collected. The authors consider the study and its results as the further development of the theoretical and experimental approaches to the investigation of ethnic identification and self-identification processes. The survey participants were Russian and Vietnamese university students. The comparative analysis of the results demonstrated similarities and differences in the characteristic and personified (anthroponymic) *self-portraits* and *portraits* of the two peoples. Among the ten most frequently mentioned qualities to describe each other, *kindness* emerged as the only common feature. Regarding ethnic *portraits,* the most frequently mentioned characteristics of the Russians were *hospitality, friendliness,* and *intelligence*; while the Vietnamese *portrait* included such traits as *hardworking, kind,* and *gay*. The most frequent self-identification characteristics mentioned by the Russians were *patience* and *courage*, while the Vietnamese described themselves as *united, hard-working* and *patriotic*. The conclusion is made that ethnic *portraits* and *self-portraits* may differ considerably, as demonstrated above. Data obtained were systemised and analysed based of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values, which resulted in noteworthy cross-cultural differences in the perception of *openness to change* and *conservation*. Data on the *personified portraits* and *self-portraits* of Russian and Vietnamese people are of interest. The collection of names of important or just famous persons as typical representatives of the people has been collected and analysed. The combined application of the international theories and the Russian ethnic conflictology approaches may contribute to gaining a clearer picture of Russian and Vietnamese mutual and self-perceptions, which in its turn will lead to a more effective intercultural dialogue.

1. Introduction

Political, economic, scientific, and human relations between the Russian Federation and Vietnam have been long-standing and continuously developing. For more than 70 years, both countries have remained in friendly relations, which is especially relevant in the context of rapid and unpredictable changes in the region and the world. In order to enhance better mutual understanding thus raise the effectiveness of intercultural communication in the Russian–Vietnamese context, the further development of bilateral relations is needed in the field of culture (Kobelev, 2017), healthcare and education (Zhidkih et al., 2018), and other areas including intercultural studies.

As worded in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, one of the key provisions of forming a mutually beneficial relationship is *"to promote the development of constructive dialogue and partnership in the interests of strengthening harmony and mutual enrichment of various cultures and civilizations"* (Kontseptsiya Vneshnei, 2016). Vietnam is one of the key partners of the Russian Federation in the Asia-Pacific region (Kobelev and Mazyrin, 2013). It should be noted that the establishment of an effective intercultural dialogue is not possible without a deep understanding of the representatives of the contacting peoples. The rational development of such relations, based on the results of fundamental and applied research, will contribute to strengthening the role of both countries in the global cultural, humanitarian, educational and scientific space, and furthermore

will promote closer integration in other areas of great importance (Guiso et al., 2006).

Scientific attempts have been made for the facilitation of intercultural communication including studies on prejudice and stereotyping (Stewart et al., 2021); value theories (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1992); research based on measurable cultural dimensions (Hall, 1969; Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1999; Hofstede et al., 2010); theories rooted in intercultural psychology (Triandis et al., 1971; Berry, 1980; Li et al., 2019); the psycholinguistic lacunae theory and theory of language consciousness (Sorokin, 2007; Markovina and Sorokin, 2010; Ufimtseva, 2012, 2014a, 2014b) to mention but a few such works.

The present article describes the first (pilot) stage of the large-scale project aimed to investigate Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions reflected in the languages and cultures studied. The ultimate idea behind the research is that the data obtained could help both sides to establish better cross-cultural understanding.

On the basis of experimental data obtained, the authors intend to collect and analyse the Russian–Vietnamese perceptions (ethnic *portraits*) and self-perceptions (ethnic *self-portraits*) focusing on the typical characteristics (qualities) of the people (qualitative *portraits/self-portraits*) and on the personalities that may be viewed as typical representatives of the people (anthroponymic *portraits/self-portraits*). Further stages of the research will involve the association experiment and further analysis of Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions from the linguistic and cultural perspectives as images of the Russian and Vietnamese language consciousness.

Any ethnic image of the world is determined by the ethnic culture, which forms, among other things, the self-perception of the people (Chiao et al., 2010), the perception of other nations (Ageev, 1985) and the world around them as a whole (Kastanakis and Voyer, 2014; Ikonnikova, 1995). Although in the academic literature the technical term *ethnic* is extensively used, in this paper the authors preferred the term *culture-specific* understanding *culture* as defined by Geertz *"a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life"* (Geertz, 1973, p. 89).

The data presented and analysed in this article has been obtained at the preliminary questionnaire-based stage of investigation of Russian and Vietnamese ethnic images and self-images, reflected in language and culture. As has been already stated, the ethnic *portraits* and *self-portraits* of the two peoples were compiled based on two interconnected domains (Sorokin, 2007): that of characteristic traits and of personalised (anthroponymic) images and self-images. Characteristic traits refer to descriptions of other nations, or respondents' own nation while personified images include names of personalities that were qualified as typical representatives or even *symbols* of Russia or Vietnam (historical figures, politicians, sportspersons etc., real persons or fiction characters).

The data obtained were further analysed by bringing into service the Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 1992). The theory synthesises findings of a cross-cultural value survey conducted in 82 countries and groups basic human values into ten motivationally different clusters. Those ten clusters are merged into four major categories including *openness to change, self-transcendence, conservation,* and *self-enhancement*. Relying on these units, the Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values enabled the researchers to investigate and comparatively analyse Russian and Vietnamese mutual perceptions and self-perceptions, focusing on intercultural differences and similarities in those.

Previous investigations of the Vietnamese language and culture ranged from empirical observations of the characteristics of verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Lenart, 2013) to partial comparative studies of languages and cultures (Lenart, 2016) and the studies of the perceptual image of Vietnam embedded in the linguistic consciousness of the Russians (Uong, 2018) and perceptual image of the world in the Vietnamese linguistic consciousness (Nguyen, 2000). Similarly, numerous associative experiments allowed to unfold Russian linguistic consciousness

(Ufimtseva, 2003, 2015; Ufimtseva and Cherkasova, 2014; Balyasnikova et al., 2018), ultimately resulting in the publication of The Russian Associative Dictionary (Karaulov et al., 2002).

However, to the best of our knowledge no comparative linguocultural research related to the examination of Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions has been carried out. It should be noted that the results of such study may find their use in cultural, business, scientific, and educational contexts, enhancing better understanding between Russia and Vietnam and paving the way for future fruitful cooperation. Therefore, the objective of the study was to obtain empirical data on ethnic *portraits* and *self-portraits* as the result of processes of ethnic identification and self-identification. Our hypothesis is that ethnic perception and self-perception differ in the number of characteristics noted, as well as in their range of meanings, thus, highlighting the difference in perception from the insider's and outsider's perspectives.

2. Materials and methods

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted online in Russia and Vietnam via Google Forms platform. Respondent groups were homogeneous as regards their mother tongue (Russian and Vietnamese, respectively), age (17–25 years), and social status (university students from their respective countries). The respondents were included in the study based on their statement that either Russian or Vietnamese language, respectively, was their mother tongue, assuming that the language and culture—as a system of shared beliefs, norms, and values that the members of society use during interaction with each other, members of other cultures, and the world (Bates and Plog, 1980)—are tightly intertwined (Kecskes, 2014). The questionnaire was first created in the Russian language followed by its Vietnamese translation (see Appendix 1 for the English translation). With regard to general ethical considerations the questionnaire was checked and approved by the Ethical Committee of Leontiev Center for Cross-Cultural Research (Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Science). The participation in the survey was entirely voluntary; the respondents provided their informed consent by pressing the "Next" button at the very beginning of the survey process.

The research material included 100-100 questionnaires randomly selected out of the total number of 109 Russian and 112 Vietnamese forms filled out by the respondents in both countries. The selection was justified by the necessity to equalize sample size in order to avoid possible Type I errors; otherwise, inaccurate conclusions might be drawn. The questionnaire had two sections, asking the participants to provide characteristic features of the Russian and the Vietnamese people and to give the names of personalities who could be regarded as *the symbols* of either nation. Following data collection, synonymous reactions found in each section were grouped under one most frequently used notion (e.g. Vietnamese reaction words including *chăm chỉ, cần cù,* and *chịu khó,* all meaning *hard-working*; Russian attributes храбрый, отважный, and смелый, all meaning *brave* or *courageous*). The analysis and grouping was performed by the native-speaking members of the research team. After that, the resultant groups were arranged into frequency lists, in which the most frequent responses were considered as the characteristics most commonly included in the *self-portrait* of each nation and in the *portrait* of its counterpart.

As mentioned above, the investigation was backed by the Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 1992). The ten motivationally different clusters introduced by the Schwartz Theory include: *self-direction; stimulation; hedonism; achievement; power; security; conformity; tradition; benevolence;* and *universalism*. As Schwartz words the essence of his conceptual framework: *"The theory identifies ten basic personal values that are recognized across cultures and explains where they come from. At the heart of the theory is the idea that values form a circular structure that reflects the motivations each value expresses."* (Schwartz, 2012, p. 2). In this paper, characteristic traits of the Russian and Vietnamese people were grouped into these ten clusters, allowing researchers to cross-culturally compare and analyse the Russian and Vietnamese *portraits* and *self-portraits*.

3. Results

A total of 437 and 238 responses were obtained from the Russian respondents regarding characteristic features of the Russian and Vietnamese people, respectively. The Vietnamese respondents provided a total of 308 responses that described ethnic *self-portrait* and 271 responses that outlined collective *portrait* of the Russians. The differences in numbers are due to the fact that the respondents provided varied number of responses (from three to five) when answering the questions. However, even at this point these numbers already suggest that respondents from both countries demonstrate less awareness of the other peoples than of their own.

Characteristic and personified descriptions given by the respondents in both countries were collected into frequency lists, resulting in three tables (Tables 1, 2, and 3), contrasting *self-portraits* of the two peoples, Russian *self-portrait* and their *portrait* by the Vietnamese (i.e., how the Russians see themselves versus how they are perceived by the Vietnamese), and Vietnamese *self-portrait* versus their *portrait* based on the Russian responses. Table 1 displays the characteristic self-perception of the two nations, marking the percentage of the top-10 mentions in each case. Four characteristic traits coincide in Russia and Vietnam including *courage, hospitality, hard work,* and *intelligence* (marked in bold, Table 1). Further to that, Russians see themselves as *kind, patient, purposeful, strong, showing solidarity* and *openness.* In the Vietnamese self-description, *unity* and *hard work* lead the frequency list with the highest scores of 47% and 44%, respectively. Vietnamese also see themselves as *patriotic, friendly, resilient, sociable,* and *creative.*

When contrasting the Russian characteristic *self-portrait* to how Vietnamese see Russians, *kindness, courage, hospitality* and *intelligence* emerge as coinciding traits (shown in bold, Table 2). Russians describe themselves as *patient, purposeful, strong, hard-working, open,* and *showing solidarity,* while they are seen by Vietnamese as *friendly, resilient, united, sociable, communicative* and *humorous* (Table 2).

Vietnamese *self-portrait* is contrasted with Vietnamese *portrait* as seen by Russians in Table 3. The single overlapping item in the top-10 characteristics is *hard work.* The most typical self-perceived character trait of the Vietnamese people is *unity,* with 47% of respondents to name it. Further self-descriptive characteristics of the Vietnamese include *patriotism, intelligence, courage, friendliness, resilience, hospitality* and *creativity.* The most frequent Russian reaction to describe the Vietnamese people is *I do not know* with 20% of Russian respondents unable to characterise Vietnamese. When asked about the Vietnamese, the Russians choose the following descriptions: *kindness, gaiety, trickery, openness, appearance, war past, individualism,* and *sincerity.*

Besides character traits (Tables 1, 2, and 3), personified *portraits* of the two nations were compiled by requesting respondents to evoke Russian and Vietnamese personalities (Table 4) who could be viewed as typical representative of the people. Russians provided 341 responses about their national prominent figures and 94 responses about the

Table 1. Russian and Vietnamese *self-portraits.*

	Russian *self-portrait*	%	Vietnamese *self-portrait*	%
1.	kindness (доброта)	30%	unity (đoàn kết)	47%
2.	patience (терпеливость)	29%	**hard work (cần cù)**	44%
3.	**courage (сМелость)**	29%	patriotism (yêu nước)	29%
4.	purposefulness (целеустреМленность)	27%	**intelligence (thông minh)**	21%
5.	**hospitality (гостеприиМство)**	21%	**courage (dũng cảm)**	20%
6.	strength (сила)	19%	friendliness (thân thiện)	20%
7.	solidarity (сплоченность)	16%	resilience (kiên cường)	19%
8.	**hard work (трудолюбие)**	16%	**hospitality (hiếu khách)**	17%
9.	**intelligence (уМ)**	14%	sociability (hoà đồng)	12%
10.	openness (открытость)	13%	creativity (sáng tạo)	11%

Table 2. The Russians: *self-portrait* versus *portrait* by Vietnamese.

	Russian *self-portrait*	%	Russian *portrait* by Vietnamese	%
1.	**kindness (доброта)**	30%	**hospitality (hiếu khách)**	23%
2.	patience (терпеливость)	29%	friendliness (thân thiện)	21%
3.	**courage (сМелость)**	29%	**intelligence (thông minh)**	21%
4.	purposefulness (целеустреМленность)	27%	**kindness (tốt bụng)**	21%
5.	**hospitality (гостеприиМство)**	21%	**courage (dũng cảm)**	19%
6.	strength (сила)	19%	resilience (kiên cường)	18%
7.	solidarity (сплоченность)	16%	unity (đoàn kết)	14%
8.	hard work (трудолюбие)	16%	sociability (hoà đồng)	13%
9.	**intelligence (уМ)**	14%	communicativeness (thích giao tiếp)	13%
10.	openness (открытость)	13%	humour (hài hước)	12%

Table 3. The Vietnamese: *self-portrait* versus *portrait* by Russians.

	Vietnamese *self-portrait*	%	Vietnamese *portrait* by Russians	%
1.	unity (đoàn kết)	47%	I do not know (не знаю)	20%
2.	**hard work (cần cù)**	44%	**hard work (трудолюбие)**	19%
3.	patriotism (yêu nước)	29%	kindness (доброта)	12%
4.	intelligence (thông minh)	21%	gaiety (веселость)	11%
5.	courage (dũng cảm)	20%	trickery (хитрость)	9%
6.	friendliness (thân thiện)	20%	openness (открытость)	9%
7.	resilience (kiên cường)	19%	appearance (внешний вид)	9%
8.	hospitality (hiếu khách)	17%	war past (военное прошлое)	6%
9.	sociability (hoà đồng)	12%	individualism (индивидуализМ)	6%
10.	creativity (sáng tạo)	11%	sincerity (искренность)	6%

Table 4. Categories of Vietnamese and Russian anthroponymic *portraits* and *self-portraits.*

	Russian self-portrait	Russian portrait by Vietnamese	Vietnamese self-portrait	Vietnamese portrait by Russians
1.	Writers (29.91%)	Political leaders (60.35%)	Political leaders (51.93%)	I do not know (71.28%)
2.	Political leaders (23.17%)	Writers (13.41%)	Military leaders (29.08%)	Political leaders (17.02%)
3.	Scientists (19.65%)	Composers (6.12%)	Writers (12.76%)	Cosmonauts (1.06%)
4.	Public figures (7.33%)	Sportspersons (5.25%)	Teachers (1.48%)	Writers (1.06%)
5.	Cosmonauts (5.87%)	Scientists (4.96%)	Musicians (1.19%)	Non-specific responses (9.57%)
6.	Military leaders (5.28%)	Cosmonauts (2.33%)	Businesspersons (0.89%)	
7.	Musicians (4.69%)	Fictional characters (1.46%)	Cosmonauts (0.59%)	
8.	Artists (1.17%)	Fashion models (0.87%)	Fashion models (0.59%)	
9.	Actors (0.88%)	Material culture (3.21%)	Scientists (0.30%)	
10.	Film and stage directors (0.88%)	Miscellaneous (2.04%)	Actors (0.30%)	
11.	Fictional characters (0.59%)		Sportspersons (0.30%)	
12.	Media persons (0.59%)		Folk heroes (0.30%)	

Vietnamese. The Vietnamese participants gave 343 responses to personify their own nation and 335 responses to make the Russian personified portrait (for detailed results see Appendices 2,3,4 and 5).

The obtained data was arranged into thematic groups including *political leaders, writers, sportspersons, military leaders*, etc (Table 4). The Russian personified *self-portrait* resulted in the following three largest clusters of anthroponyms: *writers, political leaders,* and *scientists*, accounting for 72.73% of all responses. The most frequently mentioned personalities in these categories included *Pushkin, Tolstoy,* and *Dostoevsky* (writers); *Peter the Great, Putin,* and *Lenin* (political leaders); and *Mendeleev, Lomonosov, Sechenov* (scientists) (Appendix 2).

Reconstruction of the Vietnamese anthroponymic *self-portrait* resulted in the following three most frequent groups the given personalities belong to: *political leaders, military leaders,* and *writers*, accounting for 93.77% of all responses. Top names in these three groups included political leaders: *Ho Chi Minh, Quang Trung,* and *Nguyen Xuan Phuc*; military leaders: *Vo Nguyen Giap, Vo Thi Sau,* and *Le Loi*; and writers: *Nguyen Du, Nguyen Trai, Xuan Dieu, Le Quy Don* (Appendix 3). Both the Russian and the Vietnamese anthroponymic *self-portraits* incorporated the following further categories: *cosmonauts, musicians,* and *actors/actresses*.

The Russian anthroponymic *portrait* made by the Vietnamese participants consisted of 343 responses, including *political leaders* (60.35%), *writers* (13.41%), and *composers* (6.12%). Vietnamese evoked such outstanding Russian personalities as *Putin, Lenin,* and *Stalin* (political leaders); *Tolstoy, Pushkin,* and *Gorky* (writers); and *Tchaikovsky* (composers) (Appendix 4).

The majority of the Russian respondents failed to name famous Vietnamese persons (71.28%), however the most typical answers included *political leaders* (*Ho Chi Minh, Nguyen Minh Triet,* and *Trần Đức Lương*); *cosmonauts* (*Pham Tuan*); and *writers* (*Nguyen Du*) (Appendix 5).

The Russian and Vietnamese character traits were further analysed utilising Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). Each character trait was identified as one of the ten motivationally distinct basic human values, and grouped into one of the following ten categories: *self-direction; stimulation; hedonism; achievement; power; security; conformity; tradition; benevolence; and universalism*. Frequency of negative semantic content was considered with negative values and subtracted from the overall scores (i.e., the Russian self-perception characteristic trait грусть (*sadness*) that was mentioned 5 times was grouped to *stimulation* value, and the overall stimulation score was reduced by 5).

Figures 1, 2, and 3 summarise the Russian and Vietnamese characteristic *portraits* and *self-portraits*, displaying the four key indicators in percentage as follows: *openness to change* (stimulation, self-direction and hedonism); *self-transcendence* (universalism and benevolence); *conservation* (conformity, tradition and security); and *self-enhancement* (power, achievement and hedonism). Hedonism was assigned with 50-50% weight into the self-enhancement and the openness to change clusters.

When the Russian and the Vietnamese characteristic *self-portraits* are contrasted (Figure 1), it can be stated that the most noteworthy difference is self-perception of *conservation* (16% in Russia, 26% in Vietnam).

Russians see themselves more *self-transcendent* (36%) when compared to Vietnam (28%). Smaller discrepancies can be observed in *openness to change* (Russian value is higher by 5.5%) and *self-transcendence* (Russian value is lower by 3.5%).

Major discrepancies can be observed in Russian characteristic *self-portrait* and *portrait* (Figure 2) in two areas: *self-enhancement* (24% as self-perceived by Russia, 13% as seen by Vietnamese); and in *openness to change* (24% value for self-perception while 34% as seen by Vietnamese).

Vietnamese self-perception also differs from how Russians perceive Vietnamese in all four clusters of values (Figure 3), in two cases to a more remarkable extent. *Openness to change* value is 10.5% lower in Vietnamese self-perception (18.5%) than in the Russian perception of Vietnamese (29%); *self-transcendence* is 12% higher in the Vietnamese self-perceived data (28%) compared to the Russian perception of Vietnamese (16%).

4. Discussion

The analysis of previous investigations of the Russian–Vietnamese joint research projects showed that they include a number of topics, primarily focusing on Vietnamese language and culture, and historical and political relationships between the countries (Huân, 2007; Từ, 2008; Dương, 2015). Some of the examples are the investigations of the Vietnamese language and culture that range from empirical observations and analysis of the verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Lenart, 2013) to the comparative Hungarian-Vietnamese studies of languages and cultures in the field of business (Lenart, 2016). Of particular interest are the studies of the Vietnamese image of the world (Nguyen, 2000), as well as of the perceptual image of Vietnam embedded in the Russian linguistic picture of the world (Uong, 2018). Several large-scale associative experiments allowed to unfold Russian linguistic consciousness (Ufimtseva, 2003, 2015; Ufimtseva and Cherkasova, 2014; Balyasnikova et al., 2018); based on these results, The Russian Associative Dictionary was published (Karaulov et al., 2002). The analysis of this linguocultural source yielded no relevant and up-to-date information regarding the presence of Vietnamese language and culture in the Russian language consciousness. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no Russian–Vietnamese research investigating the linguistic and cultural aspects of Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions as processes of ethnic identification and self-identification.

The research presented aimed at laying the foundation for the Russian–Vietnamese comparative linguocultural investigation, focusing on Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions.

It is important to note that although in the frames of the Russian Psycholinguistic school of thought and namely in Sorokin's work *"Ethnic Conflictology"* (Sorokin, 2007), *portraits* and *self-portraits* are referred to as of ethnic origin, in this research the authors understand the technical terms *portrait* and *self-portrait* as based on cultural groups investigated, that of the Russian language speakers and those of the Vietnamese language speakers.
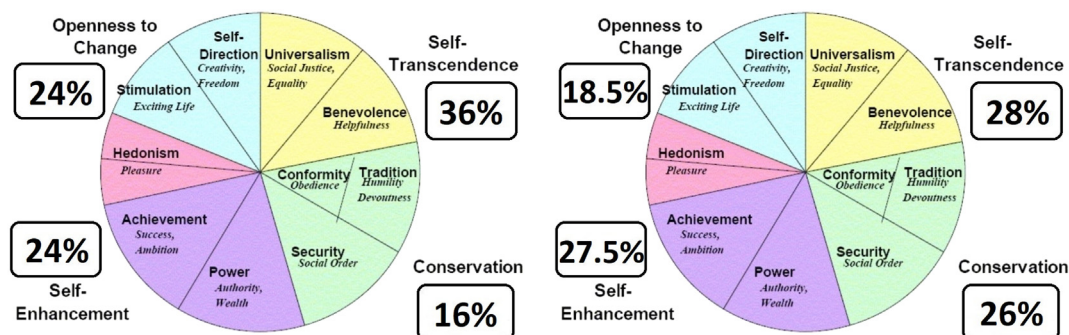

Figure 1. Russian (left) and Vietnamese (right) characteristic *self-portraits* based on Schwartz theory (1992).
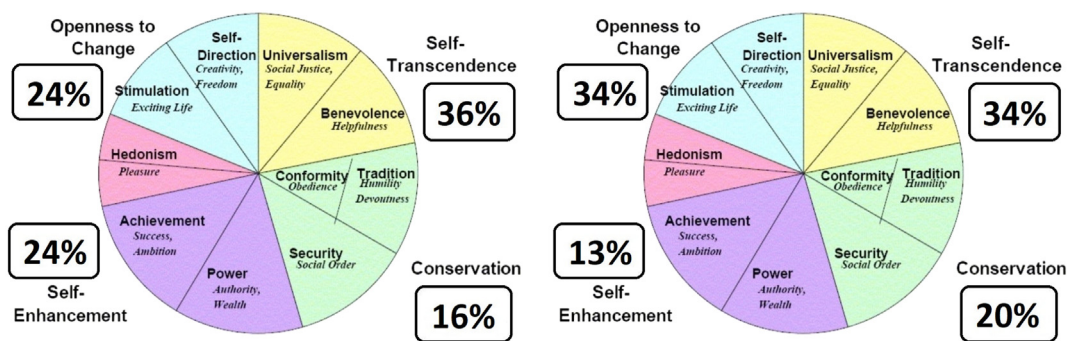
Figure 2. Russian people: characteristic *self-portrait* (left) and Russian characteristic *portrait* by Vietnamese (right) – based on Schwartz theory (1992).
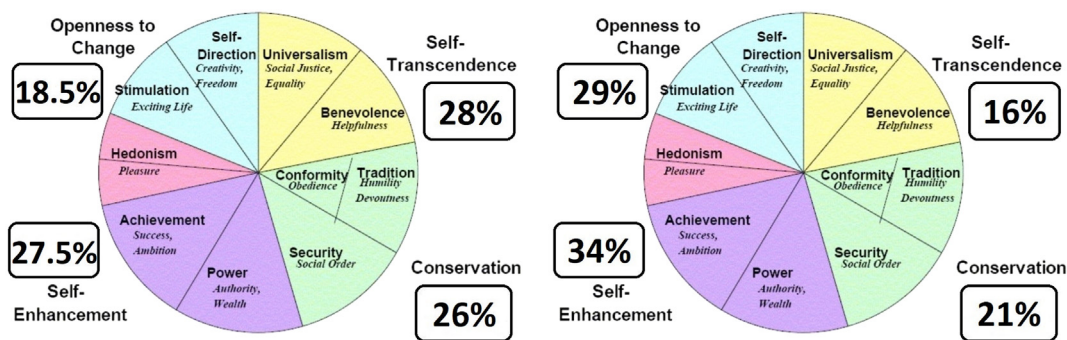

Figure 3. Vietnamese people: characteristic *self-portrait* (left) and Vietnamese characteristic *portrait* by Russians (right) – based on Schwartz theory (1992).

The Russian and Vietnamese characteristic *self-portraits* contain a relatively high proportion of overlapping with 40% of the self-perception traits coinciding, such as *courage, hospitality, hard work,* and *intelligence*. Vietnamese results demonstrate a stronger emphasis on collectivistic traits such as *unity (đoàn kết)* (47%) and *patriotism, friendliness,* and *being sociable,* while Russians prioritise more individualistic characteristics including *patience, purposefulness,* and *strength*.

Some qualities such as *kindness,* are characteristic not only of Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2019) or Russians, but rather represent universal human values (Kostina et al., 2015). However, patriotism, for example, is one of the distinct qualities of the Vietnamese nation, or, as Tran Van Giau calls it, "*the value of the values*" (Van Giau, 1980; as cited in Nguyen, 2019, p. 71), which is confirmed by the data obtained in the research presented.

As regards Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions, it can be stated that Vietnamese are generally better informed about Russia than vice versa with the most frequent Russian response registered being "*I do not know*". Russian characteristics *kindness, courage, hospitality* and *intelligence* are among the top answers by both Russians and Vietnamese. Vietnamese see Russians as *friendly, resilient, united, sociable, communicative* and *humorous,* and some negative character traits are also mentioned including they *never smile at strangers* and they are *stupid*.

The Vietnamese self-perception is overwhelmingly different from how Russians perceive Vietnamese with only one common characteristic that states that Vietnamese are *hard-working*. The Russians typically lack information about Vietnamese which can be grasped in multiple outputs of the research including: (1) 20% of Russians cannot provide any single characteristic of Vietnamese; (2) some highly generalised answers appear, i.e. (specific) *appearance, national food*; (3) some contradictory answers are given including *individualism* as a characteristic trait of the Vietnamese people. Negative traits can be also observed in the Russian responses such as Vietnamese seen as *tricky* and *untidy*.

There were several characteristics in both groups of respondents that might appear as self-criticism: Russians consider themselves *passive, sad* and *heavy drinkers,* while Vietnamese see themselves as *naïve* and *indomitable*. It is well established that self-criticism constitutes an important risk factor to psychopathology (Werner et al., 2019) that leads to symptoms of health anxiety in representatives of different nations (Akariya et al., 2021). However, it also serves an important cultural function, at least in collectivist cultures, where self-criticism may have both adaptive and maladaptive purposes (Aruta et al., 2021). One of the most known examples of explicit self-criticism is found in the Japanese culture (Takata, 2003). Although some authors suggest that this quality applies at least to the Russian Intelligencija (Maidanskaya and Maidansky, 2018) to our best knowledge, existing rigorous studies, including experimental research (Ufimtseva, 2003, 2015) do not touch upon this characteristic in Russians and Vietnamese. Therefore, further investigation of the subject may prove useful for establishing better cross-cultural understanding between the two peoples.

Some of less frequent responses are also worth mentioning, as they provide invaluable details on the research theme. For example, the Vietnamese respondents perceive the Russian people as *religious* (2.25%) and, at the same time, *superstitious* (2.25%). This apparent controversy does not correspond to the qualities that appear in the Russian *self-portrait*. Previously, it was shown that the ideological vacuum that could be observed in Russia after the rejection of the ideals and values that had guided the society for over seventy years, was at least partially filled with both traditional and non-traditional religions (Mchedlov, 2006). It is estimated that the Orthodox and Islam believers comprise the majority of religious believers of Russia. However, the results obtained in this study showed misalignment between the Russian *portrait* and *self-portrait*, suggesting that Russians, in fact, might be less religious than they appear.

Also analysed were the personified (anthroponymic) *portraits* and *self-portraits* obtained by collecting names of famous Russian and Vietnamese personalities. A disproportion of answers is observed in this regard too: Russians are less informed about Vietnamese personalities than the other way round.

The names of famous personalities were arranged into the following thematic groups: *writers, political leaders, military leaders, scientists, composers, cosmonauts, public figures, businesspersons, teachers, sportspersons,*

musicians, actors, fictional characters, artists, models, film directors, media persons, folk heroes, I do not know, non-specific responses, material culture, and miscellaneous. The most prominent groups of famous personalities of the Russian self-perception are *writers, political leaders* and *scientists*, while in Vietnam the list is led by *political leaders* (51.93%) and *military leaders* (29.08%), followed by *writers* (12.76%).

The names of the personalities obtained from the Russian respondents are partially overlapping with the recent poll conducted in Russia and aimed at establishing the list of the most prominent names in the Russian history (Samiye vidayushiesya Lichnosti V Instorii, 2021). One of the poll objectives is the assessment of the Russian cultural memory content and its structure, i.e., to describe a kind of pantheon of names symbolic to the Russians. Among the most frequent names mentioned in the poll are *Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Alexander Pushkin*, and *Peter the Great*. While the direct comparison of our findings and the poll results is not possible due to differences between the two cohorts in terms of their size and demographic characteristics, it can be suggested that the overlapping famous persons might represent the core of the Russian cultural memory.

The prevalence of writers among the responses of both the Russian and the Vietnamese respondents is hardly surprising. *Alexander Pushkin*, considered by many Russians as "*the Sun of the Russian Poetry*", can be viewed not only as notable public figure, but also as a "*cherished object of affection*"; the tribute to his cultural primacy "*seems to come not from individuals but from Russia, undifferentiated and united*" (Sandler, 2004, p. 3). Therefore, we can safely assume that in case of *Pushkin* there's a strong symbolic association between his name and the Russian cultural memory that cannot be explained by the mere fact of inclusion of his works in the school curricula. The same applies to *Leo Tolstoy*, although his name "*was firmly entrenched in the Soviet imagination as a symbol of Russia, and as her most ardent patriot*" (Bartlett, 2011, p. 444). This was achieved by highlighting Tolstoy's patriotism, reflected through *War and Peace* as a means of boosting national spirit. Taking this into account, we might suggest that the apparent lack of *patriotism* in the Russian *self-portrait* is compensated by the patriotism reflected in the works of prominent writers, namely *Leo Tolstoy*.

On the contrary, *patriotism* in the Vietnamese *self-portrait* is demonstrated both by the direct mentioning of this quality and by bringing forth *political* and *military leaders* as the famous personalities – symbols of Vietnam. *Military leaders* and *war heroes*, such as *Vo Nguyen Giap, Tran Hung Dao* and many others, are respected as national heroes of Vietnam. According to Dang Nghiem Van, the worship of ancestors is a "*long-standing religious tradition of the Vietnamese people, which is deeply rooted in their consciousness, since it represents national custom and is imbued with a sense of duty*" (Dang, 1998, p. 247, as cited in Roszko, 2010). Since patriotism was acknowledged as one of the most important characteristics of the Vietnamese national cultural identity, canonization of leaders or, more broadly, historic figures of high moral and patriotic values, can be considered as the way to preserve cultural memory through patriotic devotion.

Cosmonauts, musicians and *artists* form an integral part of both the Russian and the Vietnamese self-portrait. However, only Russians mentioned *public figures, artists, film directors, media persons* and *fictional characters* in their self-description, while *teachers, businesspersons, fashion models, sportspersons*, and *folk heroes* only in the Vietnamese self-perception dataset.

Mentioning of teachers by the Vietnamese respondents is deeply rooted in the Confucian values that remain an important part of the Vietnamese system of education, or, as Dung Hue Doan calls it, "*traditional morality*" (Doan, 2005, p. 451). As education is highly valued by the Vietnamese and is regarded as the most important attribute of status (Cultural Atlas Editors, 2016) it is no wonder that teachers are considered one of the symbols of the Vietnamese people.

The character traits were analysed by the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values and based on the above mentioned ten motivationally distinct values four bigger cluster of values were investigated following the original theory (Schwartz 1992) such as: *openness to change, self-transcendence, conservation, self-enhancement.*

The following major differences were identified:

(1) *self-transcendence* value is 8% higher in the Russian self-perception (36%) than in the Vietnamese self-perception (28%);
(2) *conservation* value is 10% higher in the Vietnamese self-perception (26%) than in the Russian self-perception (16%);
(3) Vietnamese see Russians by 10% more *open to change* (34%) than Russians see themselves (24%);
(4) Russians consider themselves by 11% higher in *self-enhancement value* (24%) than Vietnamese see them (13%);
(5) Vietnamese perceive themselves by 10.5% less *open to change* (18.5%) than Russians consider them (29%); and
(6) Vietnamese judge themselves by 12% stronger in *self-transcendence* (28%) than Russians consider them (16%).

Application of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values demonstrates two major differences in self-identification. A relatively high *self-transcendence* value supports the tendency of the Russians to see themselves as loyal, universalistic people: they stand for equality and show deep compassion for others. Vietnamese, on the other hand, demonstrate relatively low openness to change: the Vietnamese respondents generally see themselves much less *open to change* than the Russian ones.

Thus, the results obtained show that the perception and self-perception of the Russians and the Vietnamese in fact differ in the number of characteristics noted reflecting the degree of awareness about the representatives of each other's culture and their cultures as a whole. They also differ in the content of the qualities mentioned, thus, highlighting the difference in perception from the insider's and outsider's perspectives. We managed to demonstrate the empirical verification suggesting that the proposed hypothesis might indeed be valid. However, further investigation is needed which is to be carried out at the further stages of the research.

The study has some limitations, the main of which is that the authors did not compare the data obtained with the data in the existing corpora. The pre-existing corpora might provide invaluable data about the changes that occur in language and culture over time. Therefore, it would seem logical to interpret the results of the present study on the background of the data in the existing corpora. However, this issue is to be addressed in the later stages of our research.

The results obtained in the pilot study are of interest and worth considering by both parties involved: the better we know each other, the more effective is the intercultural dialogue.

5. Conclusions

This study is the first step of investigating the Russian–Vietnamese mutual perceptions in the current linguocultural landscape, breaking the ground for future investigations on the topic and providing the opportunity for scholars to delve into extremely important field of intercultural communication research.

In this study, the authors further developed approaches to the study of the processes of cross-cultural identification and self-identification, discussed and interpreted in detail by Sorokin in a series of works under the general title *Ethnic Conflictology* (Sorokin, 2007). Sorokin claimed that identification and self-identification are two conceptions that make an "*opposing and dialogical unity*" (Sorokin, 2007, p. 46). This understanding of the processes of attributing certain characteristics to representatives of one's own and another culture makes it possible to interpret such results as demonstrating the expressed axiological attitudes of the respondents' cultural/ethnic *portraits* and *self-portraits*.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the application of the international theories and methods as well as the Russian ethnic conflictology approaches may contribute to gaining a clearer picture of Russian and Vietnamese mutual and self-perceptions. The research will be continued

to investigate the content of language consciousness images by obtaining the association fields of the lexemes collected at the current stage of the project. Based on the theory of language consciousness (Ufimtseva, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Leonard et al., 2019), the major cause of cross-cultural misunderstanding is the difference in the culture-specific content of the consciousness images externalised by association fields of words of the language and shared by the language users as members of one and the same culture. The research question will be how the association images and self-images of the Russian and Vietnamese language speakers differ and what they have in common as fragments of Russian and Vietnamese language consciousness.

The authors believe that the intercultural communication can be substantially improved relying on mutual understanding of the communicating partners (Markovina and Sorokin, 2010).

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Irina Markovina; Istvan Lenart; Alexey Matyushin; Pham Hien: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Appendix 1. Questionnaire – "Us" and "Them": an Invitation to Take Part in the Intercultural Study

"Us" and "Them": an Invitation to Take Part in the Intercultural Study   https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/1rFVA3wE85dJEyU_4heHGt...

"Us" and "Them": an Invitation to Take Part in the Intercultural Study

Dear Participant,
In the framework of the intercultural survey we would like to obtain the information about your perception of the two peoples - Russian and Vietnamese. The obtained results will be used for further investigation of the mutual perception and will promote better dialog between nations.
The questionnaire is anonymous and should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be 100% confidential and results of the survey will be reported in a summary format so no one can link you to your responses.The data obtained during the survey will be used only for the research purposes.
Thank you in advance for your participation. It is extremely valuable for understanding Russian-Vietnamese mutual perceptions.

By clicking "Next" you are providing implied consent to voluntarily participate in this research study. You have the right to refuse to participate and/or not answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You have the right to withdraw from the research study without penalty prior to completion of the study (as acknowledged by clicking on the "submit" button). In order to withdraw from the study and not have any of your responses submitted simply close the internet browser without clicking on the "submit" button at the end of the survey.

* Required

Please provide some background information

1.   Your age (years): *

_____

2.   Your gender: *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Other

3.   Please, state your native language: *

_____

4. What other languages of your country do you speak? *

5. Please, state your future profession: *

The Russians

6. Please, state 5 characteristics that describe the Russians (separate your answers with commas): *

7. State 3-5 names of the most prominent personalities (people) that symbolize the Russian people (separate your answers with commas): *

The Vietnamese

8. Please, state 5 characteristics that describe the Vietnamese (separate your answers with commas): *

9. State 3-5 names of the most prominent personalities (people) that symbolize the Vietnamese people (separate your answers with commas): *

Thank you very much!

> Thank you for your time and the provided answers!

Appendix 2. Anthroponymic self-portraits: Russian self-perception

	Category	Examples	Percentage
1.	Writers	Pushkin (39); Tolstoy (14); Dostoevsky (11)	29.91%
2.	Political leaders	Peter the Great (29); Putin (14); Lenin (7)	23.17%
3.	Scientists	Mendeleev (20); Lomonosov (16); Sechenov (11)	19.65%
4.	Public figures	Navalny (4); Schulmann (4); Katz (3)	7.33%
5.	Cosmonauts	Gagarin (19); Tereshkova (1)	5.87%
6.	Military leaders	Dmitry Donskoy (5); Suvorov (5); Zhukov (4)	5.28%
7.	Musicians	Manizha (6); Tchaikovsky (5); Komyagin (1)	4.69%
8.	Artists	Ayvazovski (2); Vasnetsov (1); Malevich (1)	1.17%
9.	Actors	Durov (2)	0.88%
10.	Film and stage directors	Zvyagintsev (1); Tarkovsky (1); Stanislavski (1)	0.88%
11.	Fictional characters	Russian bear (Soviet Olympic Mascot) (1); Owl (1)	0.59%
12.	Media persons	Reshetova (1); Syabitova (1)	0.59%

Appendix 3. Anthroponymic self-portraits: Vietnamese self-perception

	Category	Examples	Percentage
1.	Political leaders	Ho Chi Minh (98); Quang Trung (16); Nguyen Xuan Phuc (12)	51.93%
2.	Military leaders	Vo Nguyen Giap (81); Vo Thi Sau (13); Le Loi (3)	29.08%
3.	Writers	Nguyen Du (22); Nguyen Trai (19); Xuan Dieu (1); Le Quy Don (1)	12.76%
4.	Teachers	Chu Van An (5)	1.48%
5.	Musicians	Trinh Cong Son (3); Nguyen Van Dong (1)	1.19%
6.	Businesspersons	Pham Nhat Vuong (8)	0.89%
7.	Cosmonauts	Pham Tuan (2)	0.59%
8.	Fashion models	Ho Ngoc Ha (1); H'Hen Niê (1)	0.59%
9.	Scientists	Ngo Si Lien (1)	0.30%
10.	Actors	Ngoc Trinh (1)	0.30%
11.	Sportspersons	Hoang Thi Loan (1)	0.30%
12.	Folk heroes	Thanh Giong (1)	0.30%

Appendix 4. Anthroponymic portraits: Russians perceived by Vietnamese

	Category	Examples	Percentage
1.	Political leaders	Putin (100); Lenin (78); Stalin (23); Marx (5)	61.81%
2.	Writers	Tolstoy (28); Pushkin (12); Gorky (6)	13.41%
3.	Composers	Tchaikovsky (21)	6.12%
4.	Sportspersons	Sharapova (12); Dzyuba (2)	5.25%
5.	Scientists	Mendeleev (13); Lomonosov (4); Kalashnikov (1)	5.25%
6.	Cosmonauts	Gagarin (8)	2.33%
7.	Fictional characters	Anna Karenina (1); Masha and Bear (1); Ded Moroz (Santa Claus) (1)	1.46%
8.	Fashion models	Shayk (1); Taran (1); Danilova (1)	0.87%
9.	Material culture	Matryoska (5); Felt boots (2); Balalaika (2)	3.21%
10.	Miscellaneous	Ocheretnaya (1)	0.29%

Appendix 5. Anthroponymic portraits: Vietnamese perceived by Russians

	Category	Examples	Percentage
1.	I do not know	Non-motivated refusals (60); Motivated (7)	71.28%
2.	Political leaders	Ho Chi Minh (15); Nguyen Minh Triet (2); Trần Đức Lương (1)	17.02%
3.	Cosmonauts	Pham Tuan (1)	1.06%
4.	Writers	Nguyen Du (1)	1.06%
5.	Non-specific responses		9.57%

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