

Individual and Social Character in the Self-Assessment of Young People

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Abstract

The article exposes the issues of the social character of young people. Problems of the social character are underdeveloped in the socio-psychological and sociological literature. Meanwhile, dynamic social, political, and spiritual processes, and their increasing uncertainty, make research aimed at studying the formation of social character of both the entire society and different generations more and more popular. The role of social character as a factor of social stability is contradictory. It can both pose a barrier to social transformations, and serve as a basis for preserving the integrity of society in crises. Social character is the socio-psychological basis for the sustainable development of society. The authors of this research offer their view on the phenomenon of social character as a manifestation of a system of orientations (stable orientation, principles, ideals, beliefs) in the social behavior of an individual, group, and society as a whole. Due to the internal socio-psychological stability of the individual, their behavior is also stable in a variety of situations. Personality reflection and assessments in the form of judgments about their individual and social character represent the self-concept. The article analyzes manifestation levels of youth orientations: self-orientation, orientation-to-tradition, orientation-to-others. The authors conclude that the differentiation between youth orientations is weak. The social character of young people is a synthesis of weakly manifested orientations towards themselves and orientations towards tradition, with the peripheral position of orientation towards others.

Key-words: Youth, Social Character, Self-concept, Self-orientation, Orientation-to-tradition, Orientation-to-others, Pandemic.

1. Introduction

The problems of studying character, though pushed to the periphery of psychological science, become relevant due to the need for scientific understanding of ambiguous, paradoxical models and styles of behavior, especially of young people. One and the same young person may combine political passivity in cases of legal opportunities (elections, public associations, political discussions) and political activity in its illegal forms. However, the paradoxical combination of activity and passivity, entrepreneurial spirit, and lack of initiative is a fairly frequent occurrence in other spheres of life of young people.

When inconsistency and paradoxical behavior become a feature of some youth group, this fact undergoes socio-psychological and sociological analysis. Therefore, this article makes an attempt to survey the phenomenon of a social character in the Self-concept, which is necessary for the study of transformations in the life of different generations, including the so-called Generations Y and Z.

"Sow an act and reap a habit, sow a habit and reap character, sow character and reap destiny" formula is an algorithm of transformations in the life of not only an individual, but also the younger generation, and, ultimately, of the whole country. It is possible to foresee the fate of the future Russian society, with Generation Z as the core of it, by studying the relevant social character of this generation, emerging in the age of digital technologies and social networks.

Popular science literature is abundant with descriptions of the behavior of the generation born in the first two decades of the new century. These descriptions are non-systemic; they do not rely on any methodology or scientific concept either. This means that individual and social psychology, and the social sciences need to elaborate on the problems of individual and social characters. Without a conceptual base, we will not be able to proceed from descriptions to revealing the essential features of the youth social behavior.

It would be unreasonable to say that social characters of various social groups have never been the subjects of sociology. Suffice it to recall the works of M. Weber "The Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism" (Weber, 1990) and W. Sombart "The Bourgeois. Sociological studies" (Sombart, 1994). Successively changing each other affective, traditional, value-rational and goal-rational ideal types personify the social characters of Western Europeans at various stages of historical development. The "philistine" and "entrepreneurial" types of the bourgeois social character also illustrate the "capitalist spirit" evolution of the Western European type.

The concept of a social character was most fully developed by E. Fromm and D. Riesman from the Frankfurt School. Erich Fromm, having formulated the concept of a social character from

the neo-Freudian and neo-Marxist perspectives, described productive and unproductive characters. Of particular interest is the description of the market character that, from the psychologist's point of view, dominates in modern Western society (Fromm, 2004, 1994, 2011). According to E. Fromm's definition, social character is "the core of the character common to most members of a culture, in contradistinction to the individual character, in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other. Social character is not a statistical concept, that is, it is not just a combination of character traits characteristic of most representatives of a given culture. ... Members of society and (or) various classes or groups occupying a certain social position within them must behave in such a way as to be able to function as required by the social system. The purpose of social character is to organize the energy of members of society so that their behavior is determined not by a conscious decision to follow or not follow a socially defined pattern, but by the desire to act in the way they should, and at the same time, satisfaction from actions that meet the requirements of culture". E. Fromm did not reduce social character to the modal (most common) type of individual characters or to their combination. The social character, he noted, is produced not by individual traits, but by the system of social relations and culture (Fromm, 2011).

While the concept of E. Fromm focuses on the analysis of such forms of social character as productive (constructive) and unproductive (destructive) orientations, D. Riesman, another representative of psychoanalysis, focuses on examining the types of orientations in the individual behavior: "orientation-to-tradition", "self-orientation" and "orientation-to-others." The formation of "self-orientation" is associated with autonomy and weakening of the influence of traditions on the individual behavior. As the American psychologist stated, since middle of the last century, "orientation-to-others" had been due to the growth of the influence of corporations, presenting the employee with a rigid set of role behaviors (Riesman, 1993).

Problems of a social character can be traced in the works of all Frankfurt School representatives, especially G. Marcuse ("one-dimensional man") and J. Habermas ("theory of communicative action"). Analyzing such types of social action as strategic, dramatic, norm-oriented and communicative, J. Habermas associated them with a negative and constructive character. The studies of the "authoritarian personality" by M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno intersect with the social character issues.

The proximity of the concepts of a social character and a national character should be specifically noted. The study of a national character originates from W. Wundt's folk psychology, and is further developed in the research by M. Mead and R. Benedict. As A. Inkeles notes, so far empirical studies of a national character have not been based on well-established analytical schemes,

a universally-accepted system of concepts, and descriptive variables (Inkeles, 2000). This assessment is also true in relation to Russian research in the field of national character. Some works are full of empiricism; others either describe individual traits of a national character avoiding theoretical interpretation, or completely lack empirical basis. As for the studies of a social character, they are few in number, compared to the studies of a national character; they also lack conceptual design and descriptive variables. In the conceptual apparatus of modern Russian and foreign socio-psychological science, the category of "social character" has acquired neither its "citizenship", nor even its "residence permit". This can be easily proved by looking at the table of contents of popular textbooks on social psychology. We can only note some attempts to investigate a social character by Russian researchers (Ivanova, Abryukova, 2016; Tolkach, 2018; Sikorsky, 2020; Belyaeva, 2018).

In our previous works we covered the essence of the "social character" category. Within the framework of this article, we will outline our view on social character. Character is generally understood as a certain stable core that manifests itself as the standard, usual behavior of an individual under standard, ordinary conditions. Hence, psychologists and representatives of other sciences try to measure individual character using numerous variable indicators of human behavior (responsible – irresponsible, disciplined – undisciplined, altruistic – selfish, etc.). But the study of character from the behaviorist perspective faces a methodological problem: to make the study complete, more and more behavioral variables are needed, which makes it impossible to reduce them to a single denominator. Character analysis in terms of humanistic psychology implies the identification of that very personal core, which manifests itself as stable human behavior. The research task is to discover in the diverse, contradictory behavior of a person what derives from this core, and what derives from the situation (Gorokhova, Gaisina, Gareev, Shutov, Shakirova, 2018; Gaisina, Dorozhkin, Yakupova, Rasuleva, Dallakian, Shakirova, 2018).

In case of a social character, not an individual one, this task appears to be more challenging. M. Maccoby noted that describing a social character in terms of an individual character resulted in confusion. According to M. Maccoby, for most people the social character is not rooted in their individual character, but is the result of the inculcation of cultural norms that determine social attitudes, and value orientations (Maccoby, 2020). However, it should be taken into account that the individual characteristics of a person are also closely related to social interactions. Therefore, we are inevitably posed with the question: to what extent and how is the social character determined firstly, by the personality core of interacting individuals; secondly, by social interactions within a particular society; and thirdly, by external social circumstances. A social character cannot be reduced to a modal (most commonly found in society) individual character or to the individual character type

prevailing in society. The social character is not only a product of culture and social interactions; it also exists in the form of social interactions and cultural standards. In the authors' view, social character represents stable types of social behavior, understood as an emergent result of social interactions. The subject of a social character is not just individuals, but also societies to which these individuals belong. Therefore, in social character studies, it is necessary to focus on the typical forms of social behavior of various social groups and strata. Regarding a social character, we consider these typical forms of behavior as immanently inherent in various social groups and strata. These types of behavior develop historically, are rooted in cultures and passed down from generation to generation in the form of traditions (Gaisina, Dorozhkin, Yakupova, Gainanova, Gainanova, Averkina, 2018; Gaisina, Bakhtizin, Mikhaylovskaya, Khairullina, Belonozhko, 2015).

The emergent result of social behavior has been the subject of various socio-psychological and sociological studies of mass behavior (crowd, public, audience, etc.). Human behavior can deviate from the individual character not only in stochastic formations, but in stable social systems as well. Individual and social characters can differ significantly under certain critical circumstances (wars, crises, disasters, etc.); an "ordinary" person with his "ordinary" behavior can manifest himself in a completely different way. In critical situations, on the one hand, the so-called cultural code and the mentality of society are most clearly manifested, on the other hand – the influence of various social expectations on human behavior (Sekerin, Gaisina, Shutov, Abdrakhmanov, Valitova, 2018). It is necessary to choose between individual and social imperatives, as opposed to the cultural ones. It should be noted that artistic research of a social character (in literature, theatre and cinema, fine arts) provides rich material for scientific analysis.

When developing a social character concept, we should take into account the limitations of behaviorism, which reduces analysis to the description of behavioral acts, while psychoanalysis and humanism focus on the analysis of the inner world of an individual. On the one hand, individual and social characters are persistent manifestations of individual and social behaviors. On the other hand, since individual and social characters are stable behavioral strategies, it is necessary to reveal what provides such stability. Individual and social characters are manifestations of essential and externally observable, and internal, latent personality traits. From the authors' viewpoint, the character of a person is an expression of their orientations. By personality orientations, we mean stable internal regulators such as ideals, principles, beliefs, and directions. Unlike motives, orientations are more stable and oversituational. We judge the prevailing character of a person by the certainty and stability of their behavior in ambiguous, unstable situations ("it shows their character"). Thus, personality orientations represent, on the one hand, the inner core of the personality, on the other hand, the

orientation of the personality's behavior. The study of individual and social characters involves the analysis of the system of "internal" and "external" orientations of the subject. In our previous research papers, within the framework of sociocultural analysis, we identified three aspects of personality orientations: orientation to the social environment (social orientations), orientation to culture (norms, values, traditions) and orientation to oneself, which are the basis of social, cultural and self-identity of the individual (Shaikhislamov, 2005). Reflection of these orientations and identities in the form of concepts, judgments, inferences, as well as self-esteem represent the We- and Self-concepts of personality. Judgments and evaluations regarding one's own individual and social character are an integral part of the We- and Self-concepts of personality.

2. Methods

The empirical basis of the study comprises data from the surveys on young people conducted by the authors over the past six years.

The authors of the article use data from the youth survey conducted as a part of the project "Information events in constructing the image of Russia within the system of "I-" and "We-concepts" of Generations Y and Z" supported by the RFBR (Russian Foundation for Basic Research) and EISR (Expert Institute for Social Research) in January 2021. The sample size amounts to 1000 people aged 18-30 years, with snowball sampling applied as a sampling method. The sampling error is under 4%.

In a study carried out within the framework of the project "Peculiarities of forming Russian civic identity in a multi-ethnic region (the Republic of Bashkortostan)", conducted in 2015-2016, the level of manifestation of self-orientation was measured, as well as orientation-to-tradition, and orientation-to-others (according to D. Riesman's typology). These three orientations are significant components of a social character. Unlike D. Riesman, who was inclined to view orientation-to-others as a negative trait of personal behavior, our judgments tend to be rather neutral. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree (completely, mainly, partially) with 21 statements on their behalf ("I always make a decision myself", etc.). These judgments, representing the respondents' self-concept, related to their social character. Each type of orientation is represented by 7 statements. There were 1000 respondents aged 18 years old and above – residents of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Young people were represented by two age groups – 18-24 and 25-30 years. The sampling is systematic, with the sampling error under 3%. A technique for measuring these types of orientations is presented in our articles (Shaikhislamov, Asadullina, Korovkina, Sadretdinova, 2019; Asadullina, Korovkina, Sadretinova, Shaykhislamov, Hajrullina, 2020).

3. Results

Young respondents' assessments of their individual character and social character of young people were measured using the semantic differential technique. Respondents were asked to assess character traits of their own, of their peers, of their ethnic group, and Russians in general according to 10 oppositions (disciplined - undisciplined, etc.). A high level of manifestation of a positive or negative position was ranged from +3 to -3 points, medium level – from +2 to -2 points, weak manifestation – from +1 to -1 point, absence of manifestation – 0 points. Negative valuations did not appear in all 10 positions. The table shows average points.

Table 1- Individual and social character traits in young people's assessments (from +3 to - 3 points)

Positive traits	Individual character	Social character of young people	Negative traits
disciplined	+1,2	+0,7	undisciplined
democratic	+1,0	+0,8	undemocratic
active	+0,6	+1,0	passive
energetic	+0,9	+1,0	apathetic
efficient	+0,5	+0,5	inefficient
optimistic	+1,1	+0,9	pessimistic
just	+1,5	+0,6	unjust
self-reliant	+1,4	+0,6	relying on others
progressive	+1,0	+0,9	reactionary
responsible	+1,4	+0,5	irresponsible

Commenting on the table, the following conclusions can be made. Firstly, respondents positively assessed all these character traits. The respondents consider both their own character and the social character of young people to be positive. Secondly, these positive assessments of character traits are very restrained. The highest indicator is +1.5 points (as a trait of an individual character), which is equal to the average value of the weak and medium level. Neither individual nor social traits are assessed by the respondents at the medium level of manifestation (not to mention the strong one). Character trait ratings can be categorized into the following groups. The first group includes assessments at higher than weak manifestation level of character traits (from +1 to 1.5 points). The second group includes assessments at weak and below weak manifestation level of character traits (from +0.9 to +0.55 points). The third group consists of the assessments close to the absence of certain character traits (+0.5 or less points).

Table 2- Levels of character trait manifestations

	Individual character	Social character of young people
highest level (+3)	0	0
medium level (+2)	0	0
higher than weak level (+1 - +1,5)	7	2
weak and below weak level (+0,9 - +0,55)	2	6
absence of traits and above (0 - +0,5)	1	2

As can be seen from the table, young people rate their individual character traits higher than the character of their peers, their ethnic group representatives, and Russians in general. Young respondents tend to be most critical about character of their ethnicity and Russians in general. Being efficient is among the most weakly manifested traits both in the individual and social characters.

The overwhelming majority of assessments range between weak positive manifestation of a quality and its complete absence. Despite the fact that the "Self -image" is more attractive for the respondents than the "We-images", nevertheless, the data demonstrate a rather low level of self-esteem. As for the assessments of their peers' image, they do not even reach a low level. Ten variables under consideration enable us to formulate a generalized view of the young people's social character: activity and energy are manifested above weak level; such traits as being disciplined, democratic, optimistic, progressive, just and self-reliant are manifested at a weak level; efficiency and responsibility are approaching the level of complete absence.

Obviously, young people's views of certain traits of a social character and those actually manifested ones can differ significantly. Young respondents' assessments of the character traits of young people can not be considered as objective indicators of the social character. However, it should be borne in mind that the social character is itself an object of social construction. Ideas about how representatives of certain social groups behave affect the strategy and tactics of people's social behavior. The presented assessments of their own character and the character of other young people testify to the fact that generally young people are not doing very well. This cannot but affect their political mood, economic behavior, and migration plans. If the symptoms are diagnosed according to W. James's formula "self-esteem = success / aspirations", then we can assume that, firstly, young people's success in various spheres of life is mostly insignificant (less successful people have lower self-esteem); secondly, most young people have not reached the desired level of professional and material aspirations, especially those with higher education; thirdly, some young people (especially in economically underdeveloped regions) have developed a consistently low level of aspirations in

recent years. Low self-esteem is determined by the current socio-economic, political, spiritual and epidemiological situation in the country, insufficient business and social career opportunities for young people.

The concept of "character" is commonly used to refer to stable, unchanging, traits of human behavior, manifested in stable situations. However, the "usual" character takes on "unusual" forms in non-standard and critical situations. Numerous true stories of war heroes – seemingly unremarkable ordinary people in peacetime – are abundant in fiction and cinema. Uncommon, exceptional circumstances determine a variety of emergent effects in a social character. The COVID-19 pandemic has recently become such a special situation. Different traits of social character are more clearly manifested in different ways under pandemic conditions. The pandemic has intensified egoistic and individualistic forms of behavior in some people, and has triggered composure, altruism, charity, and volunteer activity in others.

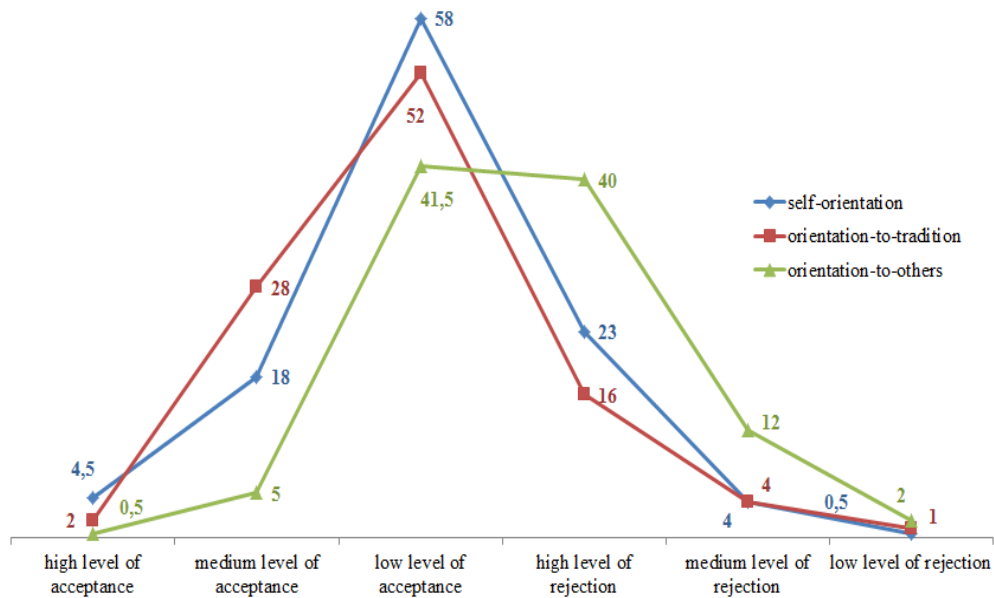
Our survey of young people in early 2021 showed that positive social traits were most frequently manifested during the pandemic. Approximately half of the respondents reported that most young people displayed such character traits as mutual assistance, responsibility for their behavior, and discipline in fighting the pandemic. From a quarter to one third of the survey respondents believe that these qualities were displayed by a smaller part of young people. Discrepancies in the assessments are due to the fact that behavior in different groups of the respondents' peers can vary. The data below shows the variety of behavioral styles of young people during the pandemic.

Table 3- Positive and negative traits manifested in young people’s character during the pandemic

Behavior traits of young peers during the pandemic	Displayed by majority	Displayed by minority	Displayed only by some people
<i>Positive traits</i>			
mutual assistance, unity	55,3	25,8	18,9
responsibility for behavior	53,8	30,5	15,7
discipline	47,9	35,5	16,6
<i>Negative traits</i>			
loneliness	30,1	35,8	34,1
indifference	28,0	33,6	38,4
aggression	18,9	29,8	51,3

Figure 1 represents respondents’ self-assessment results in accordance with self-orientation, orientation-to-tradition, and orientation-to-others (according to D. Riesman’s typology).

Figure 1- Levels of acceptance / rejection of orientations



Most respondents accept certain types of orientation to an insignificant degree (“low level of acceptance”). There are few well-defined representatives of "self-orientation", "orientation-to-tradition", and "orientation-to-others". "Self-orientation" and "orientation-to-tradition" are represented by similar levels of their acceptance and rejection, except the medium level of acceptance. These two types of orientations characterize the overwhelming majority (82-88%) of the respondents. It should be clarified that most respondents reported (at low or medium levels) both types of orientation. As for the "orientation-to-others", it is represented to a lesser extent.

The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements. Young people consider the following types of orientations unacceptable for themselves. Regarding "orientation-to-others", there is a certain balance between those who accept and do not accept this type of social character. Every fifth and fourth respondent disagrees with "self-orientation" and "orientation-towards-tradition" statements (most of them – to a moderate degree). Below is a graphical representation of the attitude of the respondents’ attitude in general, and of the young respondents, in particular, towards the three types of orientations.

Figure 2- Manifestation levels of "self-orientation"

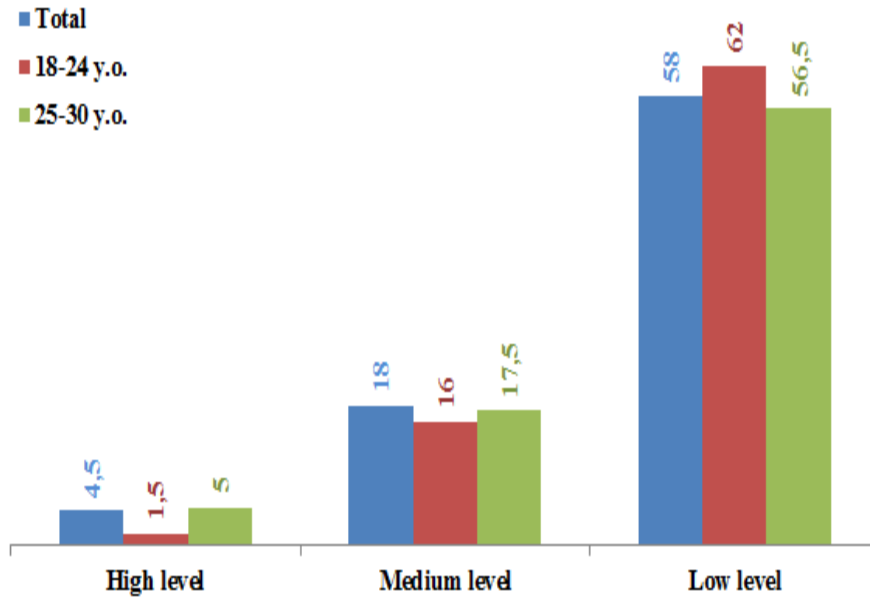


Figure 3- Manifestation levels of "orientation-to-tradition"

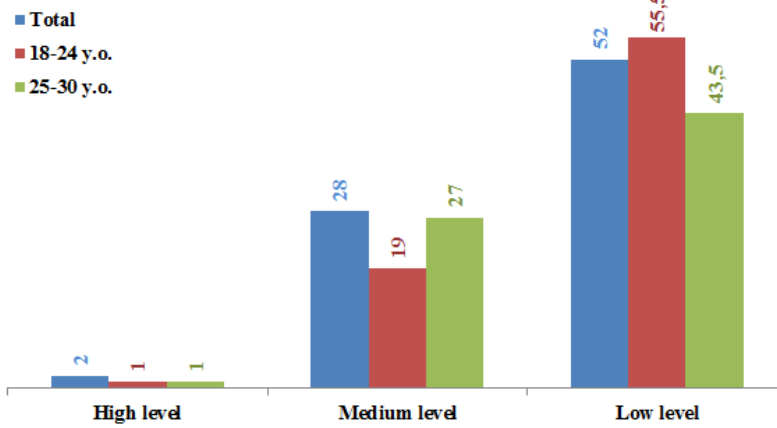
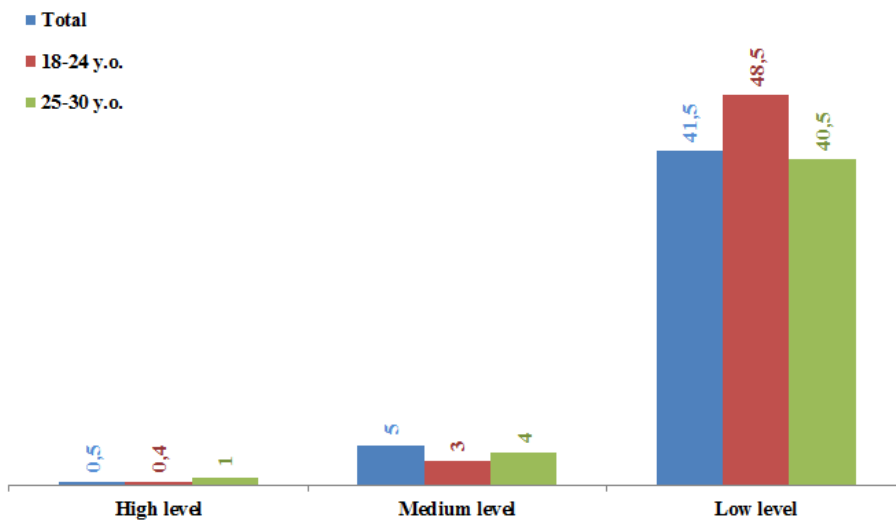


Figure 4- Manifestation levels of "orientation-to-others"



4. Discussion

The following data should be taken into account.

First, none of the orientations associated with the social character of young people is dominant. Therefore, it cannot be argued that people who are oriented towards themselves (or towards traditions, or towards their social environment) can determine the specifics of the social character in the Republic of Bashkortostan. Second, there are few typical representatives of a certain social character – no more than 5 % of respondents. Those who unambiguously represent one definite social character are non-typical representatives of young people or other cohorts.

Third, the majority of respondents (40-62%) refer to those with weak manifestation (low level) of certain orientations. Moreover, this data should be understood as a combination of all three types of orientations, most of them being weak. In this combination all orientations are more or less pronounced, but at their insignificant manifestation levels. Fourth, 20-52% of respondents consider a certain type of orientation unacceptable. Orientation towards others is assessed by a larger number of respondents as compared to other types of orientation. That brings up two questions – what is the social character of those 20-52%, and what type of character can they consider positive? These data indicate both the incompleteness, non-representativeness of the three types of orientations presented, and the nihilistic mood of some respondents who do not accept any guidelines in their behavior at all.

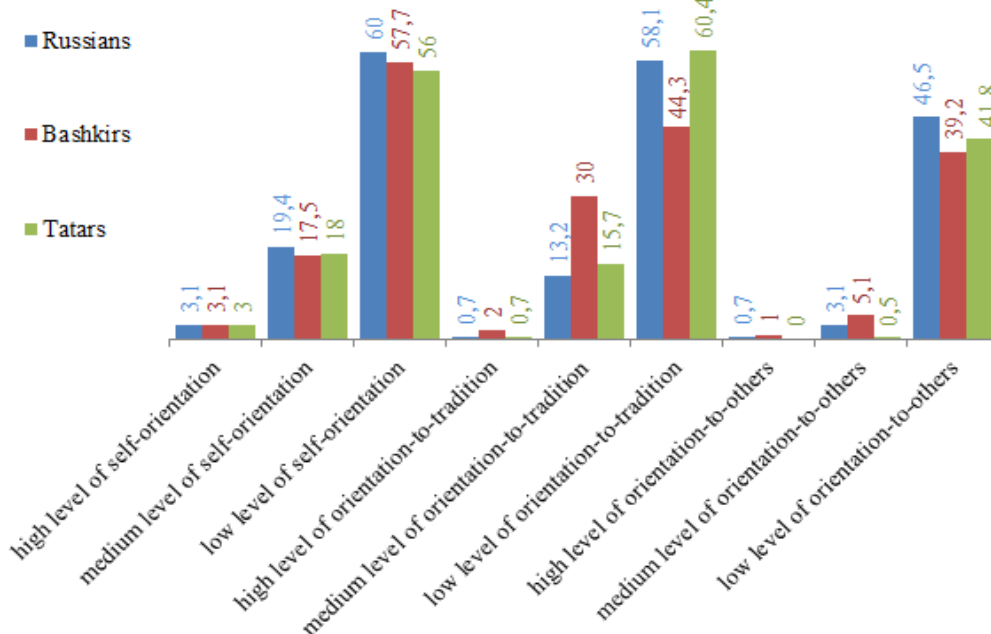
Fifth, as the comparative analysis shows, "orientation towards others" in the respondents' assessments (all levels accounting for 47% of respondents) is less popular than "self-orientation" and "orientation-to-traditions" (80% and 82% of respondents correspondingly). Therefore, it can be asserted that the social character of most respondents is a synthesis of orientations towards themselves and towards tradition.

Sixth, no "generation gap" is observed here: the indicators of the orientations of the two age groups of young people do not differ much from the indicators common for all ages of the respondents. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to assume the existence of a special youth social character, different from other generations. In this sense, young people are the same as older generations.

Bashkortostan is a multi-national region. The largest ethnic groups of the republic's population are Russians, Bashkirs and Tatars. Differences in the social character of young people of different ethnic identities are of particular interest in this regard. Figure 5 demonstrates no significant differences in the levels of self-orientation of youth of the indicated ethnic identities. There are some

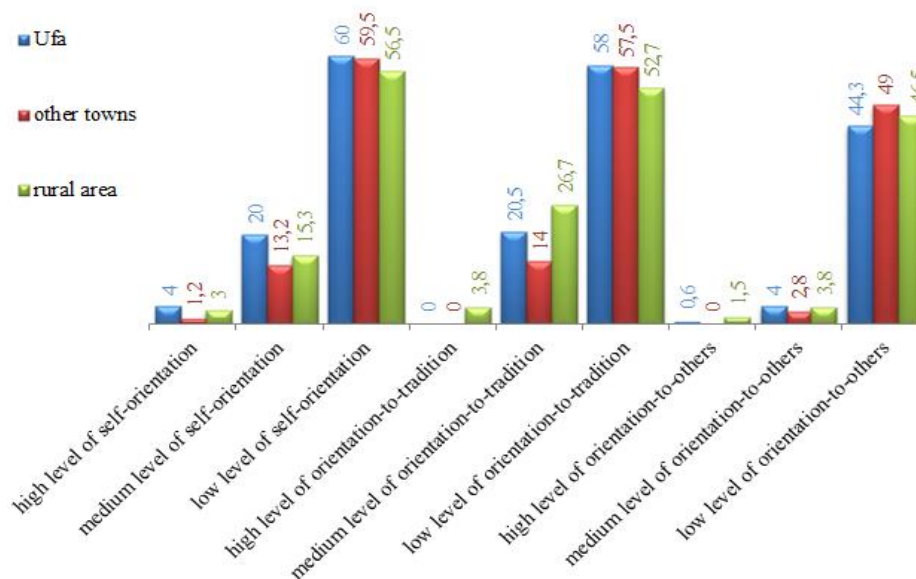
differences in the levels of orientation-to-tradition: Bashkir young people appear to be more traditionally oriented than others. As for the orientation towards others, there are almost no differences at the high and medium manifestation levels. However, at a low level young respondents of Russian identity show slightly higher, and Bashkirs – lower indicators than others.

Figure 5- Levels of orientations of young people (aged 18-30 years)



We do not reduce these differences to the peculiarities of the ethnic (national) character. Differences in the levels of a certain orientation are due to the different ratio of the urban and rural population among ethnic groups of young people. The proportion of townspeople among the Russian population of the republic is greater than among the Tatars. Simultaneously, there are more townspeople among the Tatars than among the Bashkirs living in the republic. This fact explains some of the differences in the levels of orientations of Russian, Bashkir and Tatar young people. Orientation towards tradition at the medium level of its manifestation is insignificant, but it is more typical of the rural youth, and self-orientation – of the urban youth.

Figure 6-Differences in the levels of orientations of urban and rural young people in the Republic of Bashkortostan



5. Conclusion

These measurements indicate synthesis of a moderately expressed self-orientation and orientation-to-tradition, with a less pronounced orientation-to-others. Self-orientation is closely related to human autonomy. Socio-economic and spiritual changes over the past 30 years would seemingly have led to the dominance of this orientation type, implying independence growth, an internal locus of control, and responsibility. Conversely, following traditional patterns of social behavior should have become an atypical form of behavior, especially among young people. However, in addition to their approximate parity, there is absence of any significant differentiation of the social character. It can be assumed that the formation of human autonomy does not go beyond the framework of Russian civilization. Moreover, self-orientation and orientation-to-tradition are inextricably related to each other. As for orientation-to-others, it can be assumed that the standards of market and bureaucratic behavior are neither typical nor acceptable for most of the population.

The fact that the majority of respondents are characterized by a low level of acceptance of some orientation type suggests that they simultaneously agreed with the statements related to different types of orientations. This is a manifestation of weak social differentiation. As a result, a certain symbiosis of not competing, but coexisting orientation types occurs. It can be hypothesized that such symbiosis is inherent in Russian civilization. This civilization is diverse for various reasons, including the Russian people's social character. The variety of social characters is manifested in dissimilar, fundamentally different, special types of orientations. The variety of social characters

within a certain society exists on a common basis of various types of orientations, having more similarities than differences.

The evolution of Russian civilization is different from others, primarily from Western European or North American cultures. This evolution is unlikely to follow a linear path (theological, metaphysical and positive stages according to O. Comte, affective, traditional, value-rational and goal-rational types of social action according to M. Weber, orientation-to-tradition, self-orientation, orientation-to-others according to D. Riesman). The idea of the evolution of a social character cannot be literally transferred to the analysis of other civilizations, including the Russian one.

The social character of "provincial" youth (in case of the Republic of Bashkortostan) is a kind of poorly differentiated integrity based on the synthesis of different types of orientations. If the behavioral orientations of young people do not differ fundamentally from those of older generations, this allows us to conclude that the changes in the social character of society are stable.

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