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Value Criteria of Modern Higher Digital Education Among Representatives of Generation Z in Russia and China

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Abstract: The purpose of this work is to study and disclose the main trends, directions, key features of the change in the worldview of the young generation of Russia and China regarding the demand for higher education and its digital component in the context of the political and economic reality of the two countries. The motivational foundations operating in the countries that guide young citizens to obtain higher education and those obstacles that reduce the established and formed modern values of higher education are revealed. The authors, based on a comparative review of the attitude of the "digital" generation to higher, already established, digital education in Russia and China, identified the key features, specificity and uniqueness of the role of higher education in the system of digital modernization of public relations. The authors come to the conclusion that the strategic task of modern world states is not only to provide themselves with innovative and technological advantages, but also to support sufficient potential among the working-age population, where, first of all, the educational digital competence of citizens should be taken into account.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Changes in the conditions of social development, acceleration of technical progress, reformation of multilateral and numerous economic, political and social factors entail transformation of goals, mentality and culture of generations. A unique aspect of the newest world order is the rapid development of technological progress. The digital, network field is a new historical stage of social - economic, political and cultural development of society. It stimulates, promotes not only social and spiritual deformations of the individual, but also creates new challenges for a person that require quick awareness, understanding, immediate actions and decisions. Moreover, the network system of socialization modifies society into a society of "numerous digitalized particles", the extent of digitalization of which is incredible, personal differences are monumentally delimited, which leads to the emergence of real conditions for the monomerization of the social environment and the distortion of the previously existing collective worldview (Gao, Shuguo, 2007).

The change of age groups is a natural course of development of society. The modern generation Z now reaches more than a third of the world's population. It is also an axiom that this group of people will leave their **personalized, unique, "author's" imprint in the progressive movement of economic, political, social and cultural relations** (Nguyen, 2023)**. In this regard,** the strategic task of modern world powers is not only to provide themselves with innovative and technological advantages, but also to maintain sufficient potential among the competent working population, its educational component. To identify possible prospects for the development of the state, a comprehensive study of modern representatives of living generations, their values, behavioral models, beliefs is relevant.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

The choice of the topic under study was determined by the need to understand what new vectors influence the system of attitude of the "digital" generation of the two countries to modern higher education. The object of this study was the current system of digitalization of higher education and its accessibility to the population. The subject of the study is a set of factors that determine the demand for obtaining higher educational qualifications by young people. The purpose of the study was designated as the task of studying generational changes in the characteristics of the demand for higher education in the context of the political and economic reality of the two countries.

The methodological basis of the study is built on the principles of analytical, comparative and logical approaches. The basis for the analysis of the material was the problematic and empirical methods, the values of the relationship between the general and the particular, fact and theory in the study were used. Political and economic innovations that change the value characteristics of generations are analyzed.

3 RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Research Approach to the Problem of Generation Theory in Focus of Their Values

In the modern world, there are several scientific directions for studying the theory of generations. The subject of detailed study of the adolescent and post-adolescent population has been since the end of the 19th century. Among the first to pay special attention to the issue of the mentality of generations were American scientists W. Strauss and N. Howe (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The essence of their theory is that the world is cyclical. Representatives of each generation reorganize the political, economic and social climate of a certain historical period. And at the same time, special generalized characteristics of each generation are formed depending on the properties, features of the economic cycle, and the specifics of the development of the state. Each historical period of time actively influences the period of an individual's maturation (in the first twenty years of a person's life).

In our country, the peculiarities of youth consciousness and thinking have been comprehensively studied by domestic sociologists A. V. Sapa (Sapa, 2015), N. N. Zarubina (Zarubina, 2012), N. Zorkaya (Zorkaya, 2008), psycholinguist E. Shamis and psychologist A. Antipova (Shamis & Antipov). These researchers have identified the main, priority international and local factors that have revolutionized the process of forming the worldview of representatives of generation Z. To generalize the cited scientific studies, the content of each concept comes down to the fact that in certain time periods, people appear with similar socio-psychological attitudes, skills, priorities, thinking, attitudes towards

certain phenomena and events, forms and patterns of behavior, etc.

It should be noted that the theory of generations causes some skepticism on the part of some representatives of the academic direction of science. However, in the business world, the theory of the specific uniqueness of generations has received recognition. This problem has begun to receive increased attention, giving it the character of a central task in terms of finding effective levers and universal methods of personnel management depending on their age characteristics.

Respectable, highly rated industrial, marketing, consulting PR and IT organizations are creating their own structural divisions, the main task of which is to study the behavioral properties and characteristics of representatives of individual generations, including homelanders. Among such companies, we can highlight: Google, Isos, Millward Brown, Nielsen, Sparks&Honey, Coca-Cola, MasterCard, Wal-Mart and BCG. It is also important to note that they are introducing consultants to their staff to work with zoomers. In Russia, major researchers in this field are such institutions as the Russian Association of Public Relations (RAPR), Sberbank, RUGENERATIONS (Russian school of generation theory) and many others.

In 2019, the American company Zebra IQ, specializing in marketing research and consulting, published a report on Generation Z for the above-mentioned year (Sohu, Generation Z Report 2019). In particular, the report stated that there are about 2.4 billion representatives of Generation Z on earth, which is 32% of the world's population. They are not only active consumers of the Internet, but also producers and experts of online content. The analyzed generation vigorously expresses their worldview, philosophy of life, views on social space and the environment through various social media platforms.

3.2 To the Problem of the Worldview of Generation Z of Russia and China in Relation to the Demand for Higher Education and its Digital Component

In countries with rapidly developing economies, special structures are also being created to study the values, needs, consumer abilities, physical, psychological and mental health of centennials. For example, in the People's Republic of China, the Generation Z Research Center was officially established in Pekin in 2022, and the Global Gen Z Monitoring Reports for 2022 and 2023 were released (China's Generation Z).

The conducted studies showed the following results:

1. 19% of China's population are representatives of the "digital age group". 56% of the Gen Z generation in the People's Republic of China live in first- and second-level urban areas and clearly defend the right to priority of their residence in comfortable urban conditions. It should be noted that in the country of Zhongguo, urban areas are divided into different categories or levels. The classification of cities depends on the degree of infrastructure development, literacy of the population, the specifics of its employment, the status (rating) of the metropolis, its industrial characteristics, etc.;
2. Zoomers are a dynamic, active, rhythmic and technologically advanced age group of the Chinese population. The core values and priorities of the Gen Z generation in China generally include indicators of prestigious education, self-awareness, social significance and the desire for innovative actions (The Rising Purchasing Power of Gen Z). Unlike previous generations, the needs of representatives of Generation Z are becoming increasingly focused and narrowly targeted, and various organizations and institutions provide them with diverse, hierarchical and targeted services through online platforms so that their interests and needs can be met;
3. Representatives of centennials experience catastrophic loneliness, live alone and have a limited circle of acquaintances. The conducted studies associate these characteristics with the respondents' busy work schedules, social isolation due to the rapid growth of online applications (China's Generation Z).

In addition to the listed factors, it is important to note the following reasons: a) the technological development of society, which has led to the depersonalization of relationships (in large cities, social connections are short-lived, random and anonymous); b) cultural individualism (the interests of an individual began to dominate over collective preferences and priorities); c) the political and economic development of civilizations, which denounced the value attitudes of previous generations in age group Z (Sohu, Generation Z Report 2019).

In general, Generation Z can be identified as a group of people of a certain age category that is deeply rooted in digitalization, and the growing trend of monomerization of the individual in society will certainly be reflected in all aspects of his life, including education (On the Historical Transformation of Education).

4. About fifty percent of young people representing Generation Z have completed bachelor's

degree programs. 22% of Generation Z received a master's degree and continued postgraduate education (Ponzini, A., 2020). In Celestial, the popularity and demand for education has reached its highest historical maximum. The demand for educational services at all levels of its implementation has exceeded the average values of many developed countries in the world. In particular, the coverage rate of compulsory and higher education in 2021 was 95.4%, in 2023 - 96.4% of the total population of the country, secondary and higher - 91.4%, higher - 57.8% (in 1990, this figure was 3.4%). Gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education in China from 1990 to 2023).

5. The literacy rate of Chinese citizens in 2023 was 97.7%. The total number of students in higher education institutions in China in 2023 was over 47.6 million, which is equal to 3.3% of the total population of the country and 20.4% of the number of representatives of the Zoomer generation of Celestial (Shoutao, S., Xiaofang, C., 2023). Similar indicators for the Russian Federation were distributed as follows: the number of students in universities is about 4 million people or 2.7% of the total number of citizens of the Russian Federation and 55.5% of the age group in question.

One of the leading educational holdings of the Russian Federation Skillbox and the domestic service Anketolog, specializing in marketing research and online surveys, organized a joint work in January 2025 to study the attitude of different age groups to education. The main findings of the study: 1. For 55% of representatives of Generation Z, getting an education is a means of promising financial gain and career advantages. 66% of zoomers expressed a desire to constantly be in the learning process. Boomers (Generation X) consider permanent learning as a factor of "inevitable necessity". 54% of Gen Z prefer combined types of educational activities (offline and online), only 34% of respondents of Generation Z completely prefer the distance format (Shoutao, S., Xiaofang, C., 2023).

Unlike the older generation, homelanders (82%) do not prefer video lessons, but prefer playgrounds for the subjects they study (7%) and interactive technologies (12%). Among the older generation, the preference for interactive forms of learning has a ratio of 2% and 8% for the above positions.

The level of teacher competence is also of great importance to respondents, and 41% of respondents of all ages pay special attention to this feature of education. The priority of the ratio of cost and quality of education was especially emphasized by boomers - 35% of respondents, generation X - 26%, millennials - 23%, zoomers - 15%. The need to obtain additional education to activate career growth is in demand among 40% of zoomers, while only 32% of millennials consider it effective in the matter of professional advancement, among generation X and boomers - 25 and 17, respectively. The most valuable skills among all generations are digital (33%) and self-study and adaptation (20%). The ability to work in a team as a demanded skill was noted by only 4% of respondents (Shoutao, S., Xiaofang, C., 2023).

The relevance of a higher education diploma was emphasized by only 20% of zoomers, while 30% of surveyed Russian boomers highlighted a higher education diploma as an indicator of its demand for personal self-esteem and in the labor market. Other characteristics of people's attitudes toward obtaining higher education are also interesting. In particular, 18% of zoomers attribute the following obstacles to learning: lack of proper concentration, lack of interest - 13%, disbelief in one's own abilities - 10% (The PRC Ambassador to the Russian Federation).

On average, the share of young people from among zoomers receiving higher education is 27%.

It is important to note that recently, according to some Russian researchers, the time has come for the "completion of the expansion of higher education" (Malinovsky, Shibanova, 2022).

Based on statistical data and sociological monitoring, the authors prove a practical decrease in the number of Russians studying in higher education institutions of the country. This fact is determined by the lack of economically acceptable, logically justified proposals from the university system, a decline in the financial accessibility of higher education and a change in the economic productivity of educational strategies. The decline in consumers of the university product arose due to an increase in the share of less affluent and educated families who reoriented their educational expectations and opportunities towards secondary vocational education, where the digitalization process in many cases has higher indicators relative to the current university system and generally meets the requirements and challenges of the digital society (In Russia, zoomers often study for the sake of salary).

In contrast to the Russian reality, the Chinese education system is experiencing a "phenomenon of digital education fever" (Bieleń, Kubiczek, 2020). This phenomenon is largely due to Chinese traditions and mentality. Education in Celestial is seen as a social elevator that provides unique opportunities for professional growth. The highest life result for citizens of the republic is achieving the status of a civil servant. A representative of state power has historically (since the Qin Dynasty - 17th - early 20th

centuries) been considered a highly respected representative of the middle class, which defines education as an effective tool for strengthening its social foundation and advantages over representatives of lower class groups. To increase the value of an individual in society and achieve the proper social level, according to the canons of the Chinese worldview, a quality education is necessary, which provides for an increase in cultural capital. Moreover, cultural capital is capable of generating three more forms of capital - economic, symbolic and social (Ponzini, 2020).

Thus, in the People's Republic of China, many people want to enroll in universities and obtain higher education. However, of the total number of people who have completed their studies at secondary level educational institutions, only 10% of the graduates enter higher educational institutions of the country (Jianhui, 2023). More intense competition in China is observed when entering educational master's programs, which means that for a certain part of young Chinese with low academic performance, the highest level of higher education is inaccessible. This circumstance has determined the mobility of Chinese youth, including to Russian universities; wealthy Chinese families are ready to pay for their children's education, including in a master's program, abroad. The voluntary cost of obtaining a master's education is motivated by the possibility of applying for a prestigious position in Celestial in the future (Csobanka, 2016).

Based on the existing internal and external factors, China has established educational cooperation and student exchanges with 188 countries and regions of the world, as well as with more than 40 recognized international organizations, thereby confirming the status of the largest Asian country and the third among the world countries that can offer Chinese young citizens high-quality education abroad. It is also important that 56 countries of the world have recognized the relevance of academic degrees from Celestial, including Russia (World Values Study). It should be noted that educational cooperation between these countries has deep roots and promising trends for fruitful development.

In 2019, the number of bilateral academic exchanges between Russia and China exceeded 100 thousand people, which made it possible to talk about the early achievement of the goal set by the heads of the two states and the compliance of education in the analyzed countries with the requirements of the digital society (On the Historical Transformation of Education).

According to data from July 17, 2024 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, in 2015, 11.8 thousand Chinese students were mastering university educational programs in Russia, in 2019 - 23.7 thousand people, in 2022 - 37 thousand people, in 2023 the number of students from China amounted to more than 40 thousand people, which is a statement of the growing interest of Chinese youth in Russian educational programs and their compliance with the expectations of Gen Z (How to attract Chinese students).

According to the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Russia Zhang Hanhui, as of 1 October 2024, 44 thousand Chinese students are studying in Russian higher education institutions, 35% of whom are studying for master's degrees, more than 12 thousand Russian youth are studying at universities in China (The PRC Ambassador to the Russian Federation). The share of Chinese students in the total number of foreign students studying in Russia is 13.6%. The share of Chinese students studying in Russia in 2024, out of the total number of those who went abroad to study, is 4.7%. The Russian Federation ranks sixth among all countries in the world in terms of the number of students from China.

4 DISCUSSION

A comparative review of the attitude of the "digital" generation to higher education in Russia and China revealed the following key features:

1. The "digital" generation perceives education as a significant, key socio-cultural indicator that predetermines the nature of self-expression and self-development of the individual, a source of professional advancement, and is considered by young people as a guarantee of financial well-being, achieving a status position in society, while at the same time there is a contrast in the interpretation and explanation of the standard-classical expediency and importance of studying in a higher educational institution.
2. The issue of social inequality regarding higher education is urgent for both the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, which has led to different features and characteristics of the attitude of Generation Z towards studying at a university.
3. Today, young Russians are experiencing a transitional period of evaluation and involvement in individualistic and collectivistic metaprograms of behavior and self-realization. Due to their growing desire to define themselves as significant individuals in the future, their commitment to parity in any and

all situations, and their unambiguous conviction that personal interests take priority over all other circumstances, including public ones, we can clearly state that the "digital" generation has made a transition to an individualistic worldview and understanding.

4. The main criteria and values of higher education for young Russians are practical benefits, continuous education, and independence. In our country, the generation of zoomers is gradually being retrained from two-tier higher education to secondary vocational education, or at best, a bachelor's degree. Further education is not considered pragmatic and appropriate for acclimatization in the labor market. This is primarily due to the high cost of education, low incomes of the majority of the population, and the insufficient demand for specialists graduated by universities in the labor market, as well as the emergence of employment areas in the labor market that do not require specialized higher education.

The Chinese representatives of the studied generation generally profess modified (conditioned by state ideology) collectivist sentiments. They put career and investment in education in the foreground, which will allow them to achieve the desired level of professional growth in society. A pragmatic approach to the above result is the primary priority in the value attitudes of young Chinese. The traditionally prestigious status of an individual in society for this country occupies a central place in the consciousness of both the younger generation and their parents. Fierce competition for admission to educational master's programs has determined the noticeable educational mobility of zoomers abroad, including to Russian universities, and resourceful Chinese families are ready to pay for their children's education in a master's program abroad. The main criteria for the value of higher education for Chinese young people are the opportunity to integrate into a professional environment, self-realization, for which they begin to prepare from childhood.

5 CONCLUSION

Summarizing the presented material, we can state generational changes in the characteristics of the demand for higher education in the context of the political and economic reality of the two countries.

The developing digital field, as a new historical stage of social - economic, political and cultural development of society, stimulates social and spiritual deformations of the individual and forms new challenges for a person that require rapid awareness, understanding of the situation, immediate actions and solutions. Moreover, the network system of socialization modifies and distorts the collective consciousness that previously operated in the two countries with varying speed.

Based on the studied material, it can be argued that despite the high value rating of modern higher education on the part of the younger generation of the two countries, its receipt largely depends on family income and the demand for highly qualified specialists in the labor market.

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