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# ETHNO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF UKRAINIANS,

OR THE PATH TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

# ЕТНОПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ УКРАЇНЦІВ,

АБО ШЛЯХ ДО САМОПІЗНАННЯ

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**Abstract.** The relevance of this topic for our country is extremely high. First, in the social dimension, modern manifestations of ethnic identity have emerged when the problems of national unity, consolidation of society in the context of military operations in the East of the country, annexation of territory by a neighboring state, and the split of society along polar lines, such as the readiness of a part of the population from one region to join a neighboring state and, at the same time, a high level of patriotism and selfless struggle for territorial integrity and independence among the population of other regions. Secondly, regarding state-building processes, the multiethnicity of Ukraine's population and the long period of cohabitation of representatives of different nationalities contributed to ethnic tolerance. It exacerbated the problem of regional cultural and historical heterogeneity in geopolitical, ethnocultural, and religious orientations. It is also significant for personal development, as knowledge of national character traits becomes the basis for one's position, free from the influences and manipulations of propaganda.

**Keywords:** ethno-psychological characteristics of Ukrainians, national character, Ukrainian ethnopsychology, Ukrainian culture, the intellectual activity of the people, Ukrainian egocentrism, national identity.

**Анотація.** Етнопсихологічні особливості українців. Актуальність даної теми для нашої країни надзвичайно висока. По-перше, у суспільному вимірі: виявилися сучасні прояви етнічної самобутності, коли на перший план виходять проблеми національної єдності, консолідації суспільства в умовах військових дій на Сході країни, анексії території сусідньою державою, розколу суспільства за полярними показниками — як-то готовність частини населення з одного регіону увійти до складу сусідньої держави й водночас — високий рівень патріотизму та самовіддана боротьба за територіальну цілісність і незалежність з іншого. По-друге, у плані державотворчих процесів: поліетнічність населення України, довготривалість спільного проживання представників різних народностей сприяла як формуванню етнічної толерантності, так і загострила проблему регіональної культурно-історичної різноманітності у геополітичних, етнокультурних та релігійних орієнтаціях, що, крім того, вкрай важливо для розвитку особистості, адже знання про риси національного характеру стають підґрунтям власної позиції, вільної від пропагандистських впливів і маніпуляцій.

**Ключові слова:** етнопсихологічні особливості українців, національний характер, український етнос, інтелектуальна діяльність народу, український егоцентризм, національна ідентичність, українська культура.

**Introduction.** Every modern nation, determining the ways of its development and analyzing the causes of historical failures, seeks the fullest possible self-knowledge. Given this, the problem of studying the ethno-psychological characteristics of Ukrainians, so to speak, their national character, is becoming increasingly important.

National character captures the typical qualities and psychological characteristics of a particular ethnic group that shares territory, language, history, culture,

customs, and symbols that distinguish it from another community. In other words, national character can be viewed as a separate way of thinking, behavior, people's perception of themselves, perception of the surrounding reality, and its forms of manifestation, which can be traced in folk art, folklore, language, customs, and traditions. National character is built slowly, over centuries, in specific historical and socio-economic conditions of the nation's existence and is passed

down from generation to generation through the mechanisms of the social psyche, and therefore, cannot change quickly. Accordingly, national psychological traits are characterized by conservatism and stability. However, no national character trait can be attributed exclusively to a particular nation. Each of these traits is universal. Thus, it is impossible to say, for example, that one nation is characterized by being organized, another by cleanliness, and a third one by impulsiveness or kindness. In this case, we should talk about different degrees of expression of a particular trait and the specifics of its manifestations, given that national and social qualities coexist in any group of people.

Thus, national character is a set of socio-psychological traits characteristic of all members of a particular nation, a system of fundamental values, moral requirements, and beliefs shared by the vast majority of the people. It is a specific model of personal education that dominates a particular culture. The originality of the national psychology of a people is expressed not in unique psychological traits but in their unique combination, manifestation in certain customs, historical traditions, etc. Therefore, it is essential to know what historical conditions led to the emergence of those traits, habits, and feelings in the national character of a people that representatives of another ethnic group can interpret as positive or negative.

It is equally important to recognize the flaws in the mental makeup of one's people, not to absolutize positive traits, not to silence those that hinder their development.

**State of the Art.** The character traits of the Ukrainian people have been analyzed from various perspectives by philosophers, historians, educators, psychologists, and prominent writers, poets, political, religious, and public figures. The characteristic traits of Ukrainians were described by Mykola Kostomarov and such well-known thinkers as Volodymyr Antonovych, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Mykhailo Drahomanov, Panteleimon Kulish, Viacheslav Lypynsky, and others. However, in Ukraine during the Soviet era, national studies were not properly conducted. Work in this area was carried out only in western Ukraine (before the Second World War) and in the Ukrainian diaspora abroad (Ivan Mirchuk, Oleksandr Kulchytskyi, Volodymyr Yaniv, Yakym Yarema, and others).

The work of Ukrainian scholars from the diaspora has made an essential contribution to the study of Ukrainian mentality and ethnopsychology. Concerned about the fate of their homeland in a foreign land, scholars

tried to explain the essence of the Ukrainian mentality and the place of the Ukrainian ethnic group in the development of the world. Scholars in Ukraine could turn to studies of the national character only after the proclamation of Ukraine's independence.

Among the contemporary Ukrainian researchers who study the originality of the Ukrainian ethnos, we can single out Petro Hnatenko's work *National Character* (Bychko, 1993). Mentality as a factor in the revival of the best traditions of the Ukrainian nation is considered in the works of Ada Bychko, Ihor Bychko, Oleksandr Nelma, Maria Piren (Bychko, 2000; Vashchenko, 1997; Vashchenko, 1999; Hnatenko, 1997) and others. Halyna Lozko devoted her work to the problem of the influence of historical factors on the formation of the national character of Ukrainians (Kulchytskyi, 1995). These studies are especially relevant in Ukraine today, given the need for scholarly substantiation of state-building strategies, adequate self-presentation of Ukraine in the international arena, and resolution of acute socio-political conflicts in the country.

According to Professor Oleksandr Kulchytskyi (Lypa, 1953), the peculiarity of the Ukrainian mentality was formed under the influence of racial, geopsychic, historical, sociopsychic, cultural-morphic factors and deep psychological reasons. Interestingly, the theory of the genetic individuality of the national character was most criticized in the Soviet Union. In particular, Igor Kohn wrote that "the biological interpretation of national psychology has always been typical of racist theories."

**Results and Discussion.** Since each nation lives in a specific territory with its natural features, this also affects the formation of the national character. It is not for nothing that Ukrainians are distinguished by their love of nature, exceptional lyricism, craving for contemplation, and calmness. Living on a rich, fertile land that provides for people with little effort, our ancestors needed to sufficiently develop such a trait as activity. At the same time, numerous conquerors have constantly encroached on the rich territory with fertile lands where Ukrainians lived, so under the influence of historical factors, namely the need to protect their native land, the Ukrainian people developed belligerence — the "Cossack" type of character.

The national character is most fully reflected in the culture and intellectual activity of the people.

The uniqueness of Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian person as its subject and creator was presented through fiction and poetry, music and painting by such prominent

figures as Mykhailo Verbytskyi, Mykola Hohol, Semen Hulak-Artemovskiy, Oleksandr Dovzhenko, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko, Ivan Kotliarevskiy, Panteleimon Kulish, Lesya Ukrainka, Mykola Lysenko, Ivan Franko, Taras Shevchenko, and others. Psychologists have long and fruitfully used works of art to study the peculiarities of national character.

“The culture of a nation has been created for a very long time, starting with the prototypes of ethnic mythology and ending with modern poetic creativity,” wrote Oleksandr Kulchyt'skyi, “the worldview of ancient Ukrainians has organically entered the mentality of their descendants. National images of the world (often subconscious), stereotypes of behavior, mental reactions, or assessments of certain events or individuals always reflect ethnic mentality, which can be called the ‘spirit of the people’. The cosmopolitan culture, the researcher argued, which until recently was called international, denationalizes the individual, deprives them of a sense of patriotism, and is, therefore, harmful to the nation (Lypa, 1953).

According to Yurii Lypa's concept, four prehistoric cultures influenced the formation of Ukrainian culture: Trypillian, Pontic, Gothic, and Kyivan Rus' (Lozko, 2009).

The Trypillian prehistoric culture, as scientists have found out, has an ethnic connection with the prehistoric culture of Asia Minor. However, the Trypillians lived in much harsher environmental conditions than the Asia Minor people. They have left Ukrainians a legacy of patience, silent courage, modesty, caution, perseverance in achieving goals, and the ability to persevere in the face of failure. “These are the character traits that swirl in the blood of modern Ukrainians, and their deeds and achievements can always be revived in them,” wrote Yurii Lypa. Modern cities and villages have grown up in the places where the Trypillian civilization formed them millennia ago. The Trypillians built proto-Ukrainian ramparts and roads and turned the land into farm fields. We inherited from them the psychology of a farmer, family customs, respect for mothers and women, and a democratic social system.

Pontic prehistoric culture is the culture of the northern Black Sea region (Hellenic). It is close and sometimes identified, with the culture of the Scythians. From them, Ukrainians inherited entrepreneurship, creative spirit, and a taste for beauty, as well as various unions, communities, artels, etc. “The individualism of the Ukrainian,” wrote Professor Shcherbyna, “is opposed to herd mentality, but his devotion to his favorite work encourages him to find allies and like-minded people.

The Gothic prehistoric culture (the Goths came to Ukraine through Volyn from the Ostrogothic Empire) also influenced the formation of ethno-psychological differences among Ukrainians. We can thank the ancient Goths for such traits as being organized, steadfastness of character, military and state discipline, and loyalty to agreements.

We owe the Kyivan Rus' prehistoric culture a sense of deep Ukrainian patriotism that has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries. The state of Kyivan Rus', which existed for about 700 years, allowed Ukrainians to develop their political traditions, which were preserved by the princely elite even in the state of Lithuania and continued by the Zaporozhian Cossacks until the abolition of the Hetmanate, as well as to realize the spirit of freedom and national pride.

Yurii Lypa notes that this exciting combination of different cultural influences created a type of Cossack that surprised foreign historians: these Cossacks were both military men and traders selling fish and furs, etc. Catherine the Second envied the Cossacks' ability to implement economic policy, and a Polish historian wondered where Bohdan Khmelnytsky got the money to fight the war.

The formation of the national character was, of course, influenced by the so-called ethnic admixtures. The influence on the Ukrainian nation of the Celtic and Norman ethnic groups, who were warlike and poorly organized, but had creative elements (Celts-Scythians, Varangians), was insignificant. Roman and Thracian ethnic influences are evident in the character of southern Ukrainians in the Carpathians, Podnistrovia, and Bukovyna. Jewish admixtures added some mediating abilities to the psychology of Ukrainians. The role of Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and German factors in Ukrainian ethnic psychology and anthropology has been greatly exaggerated by some scholars, especially Russian ones, and is insignificant.

Regarding Russian (Muscovite) admixtures, Yurii Lypa notes in his work *The Destiny of Ukraine*: “Kyivan tribes conquered several Ural-Altai nomadic tribes without culture or state and later, in the tenth and twelfth centuries, they were dominated by the Novgorodian culture and christianized, forced to adopt the liturgical language of Kyiv, serfdom (for better economic exploitation), and a name indicating affiliation with Kyivan Rus' ('russkie'). Mongol enslavement, which lasted the longest among all European peoples, gave them a common deep sense of the sanctity of power, even if it was most brutal, and contempt for the individuality of their own and other people.” Yurii Lypa concludes, “Muscovites had

too weak an individuality to influence someone spiritually. They left a minor impression, without any traces.”

As for the national character and psychology of Russians, according to the works of both Russian and foreign authors, the Moscow ethnos were formed under the more significant influence of the Ugric-Finnish and Tatar-Mongolian ethnic groups than under the influence of the Slavic ethnic group.

In his work “Ukrainian Spirituality in Its Cultural and Historical Manifestations,” Yakym Yarema emphasizes the immersion of Ukrainians in the inner world and refers to us as introverted people who are characterized by a negative, critical, and even mocking attitude toward reality: “We run away from it [reality] into solitude, or our inner world, or we ignore it, or we idealize it. In all these cases, we take a passive stance against it.” Historical calamities caused another “escape from the world, and after that, new external calamities fell on the land and the people.”

Self-absorption, in turn, has led to Ukrainian egocentrism. “The center of gravity rests on ensuring individual freedom.” At the same time, egocentric Ukrainians are endowed with the ability to have “social sympathy, humanity,” “to help” and can identify with others. The researcher notes that we exhibit a social trait “significant for the Ukrainian spirit” — “the ability to understand another nature, another person, another nation — to understand that everyone can have their way, more natural for them than ours.”

Tolerant, lenient attitudes toward other peoples and religions stem from another feature of the national character, the non-aggressiveness of Ukrainians. As Yakym Yarema notes, Ukrainian good-naturedness was already in full force in princely times, and the spirit of Christianity only strengthened this quality. Let us recall the commandment of Prince Monomakh: “Do not kill either the guilty or the innocent, even if they deserve death — do not destroy the soul of any Christian.”

At the same time, according to researchers, tolerance (i.e., tolerance, complaisance, and sometimes inconsistency) can also be a manifestation of a lack of strong will. Excessive tolerance may indicate a person’s immaturity and there is a risk of being influenced by external pressure. Therefore, an individual needs to engage in self-development, develop conscious personal beliefs to prevent themselves from being manipulated and be able to make the right choice.

Hryhoriy Vashchenko emphasizes the innate religiosity of Ukrainians in his “Supreme Ideal” (Vashchenko, 1997; Vashchenko, 1999). The source of religiosity

is Ukraine’s frontier position and constant threats from its neighbors. At the same time, “peaceful agricultural occupations contributed to the humility of Ukrainians and their general intelligence. A prehistoric farmer had more opportunities than a shepherd or a hunter to reflect on the mysteries of nature and human life. This is also connected with a certain depth and richness of aesthetic and emotions of love.” The emotional and aesthetic dominance of the Ukrainian nation is manifested in the desire for beauty, love of life, and makes Ukrainians well-endowed with creativity. The Ukrainian song, “in terms of its content, richness, depth, and variety of experiences reflected in it, beauty and melody, ranks among the first among the songs of the peoples of the world.” In general, the Ukrainian ethnic group has given humanity outstanding artists in various fields of culture. However, if emotionality and aestheticism prevail in a person, they risk becoming too dreamy, inert, and content to observe events rather than be an active agent.

A fascinating material for studying the ethno-psychological characteristics of Ukrainians is provided by analyzing sayings, proverbs, and aphorisms that people consider to be most representative of our nation’s attitude toward itself and the world around it. These short, apt expressions, which artfully convey reactions to various life events, characterize the peculiarities of the national character, behavior, and way of thinking. They are a set of rules that people use in everyday life, short guidelines based on the experience of generations; they prescribe or restrict, approve or condemn, instruct or warn. In addition, proverbs and sayings are the generalized memory of the people and conclusions from life experiences that make it possible to form views on ethics, morality, and history.

When asked which expressions correspond to the national character of Ukrainians, the largest group (27.5%) put in the first place expressions reflecting autonomy, personal independence, and a reluctance to act together in a consolidated manner: “The less you know, the better you sleep,” “Your shirt is closer to your body,” “My house is on the edge of the village, I know nothing,” “I am not me, and my hand is not mine,” “A hungry man is not a friend to a sated man,” “Where there are two Ukrainians, there are three hetmans,” “I do not eat it myself, nor will I let anybody else eat it,” “If I don’t eat it, I’ll bite it at least.”

The second place is occupied by sayings that reinforce the prudence, caution, and moderation of Ukrainians: “Measure seven times, cut once,” “You live

and learn,” “Treat others as you want to be treated,” “A word is not a sparrow, if it flies, you cannot catch it,” “A good man is good everywhere,” “An uninvited guest is worse than a Tatar.”

Quite numerous (about 25%) is a group of expressions that indicate patriotism, perseverance, unity, mutual assistance, and struggle: “My home is on the edge of the village, I am first to meet the enemy,” “To live is to serve the Motherland,” “The Ukrainian lot never dies,” “Freedom is the true spirit of a Ukrainian,” “Fight and you will win.”

The following sayings indicate sincerity in feelings, responsibility, and intergenerational communication: “Even if it is spicy, it was cooked in good spirit,” “You can see your friend from afar,” and “The stem is no different from the seed.”

Hard work as a typical trait of Ukrainians is observed in 9% of the total number of sayings: “No fruit without work,” “You do what you enjoy doing,” “You reap what you sow,” “Work is not a wolf, it will not run into the woods.”

The sense of national identity of a people is formed rather slowly. It consists of many social, economic, and political factors, but it can grow and weaken under the influence of external threats. The defining condition for forming national identity is a positive perception of citizens of their nation, country, and state. According to sociological studies, a positive trend in the formation of Ukrainian national identity is that most Ukrainians, despite the country’s regional heterogeneity, significant differences in geopolitical and value orientations and socio-economic problems, are proud of Ukraine and consider themselves patriots. Thus, according to the research data of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Razumkov Center, in 1992, only 45.6% of respondents chose “citizen of Ukraine” out of nine options in response to the question “Who do you consider yourself to be?”, whereas in 2010 the figure was 51.2%, and in 2014 it reached 73.2%. This trend can be considered a relatively positive result.

In addition, since independence, the vast majority of the country’s citizens have become accustomed to the country’s state symbols and perceive them as their own. All of this indicates that the Ukrainian civic identity is growing in strength, with most of the citizens beginning to identify themselves primarily with their own country. There is also a growing understanding of the need to develop the political agency of citizens as a defining characteristic of a political nation. According to a survey

conducted by the Gorshenin Institute, most Ukrainian citizens (83.2%) believe they should have a real influence on government decision-making.

Contemporary researcher Maria Piren has paid attention to the formation of the mentality of young people in Ukrainian post-totalitarian society. Recent historical events have provided the younger generation with invaluable experience in terms of awareness of national identity. The spirit of the Ukrainian ethnos proved to be morally and psychologically healthy enough to revive the language, culture, and best folk traditions and build a state that had been destroyed for more than three centuries. This is a vivid affirmation that the Ukrainian national character was built not on destructive but on constructive elements of humanism, love of life, creativity, and a friendly attitude toward representatives of other ethnic groups.

Thus, according to researchers, the ethno-psychological makeup of a Ukrainian is a series of opposing qualities: contemplative worldview, humility, moral self-improvement, a passionate desire for change for the better, knowledge, action, restructuring, and heroism. Because of the lack of balance between intellectual, purposeful, and emotional principles, Ukrainian psycho-culture is exceptionally plastic, flexible, and responsive. Ukrainians need to analyze and realize each trait separately, understand their relevance for developing a mature personality, find their own selves, and move forward on the path to creating a harmonious person.

**Conclusions.** The ethno-psychological characteristics of Ukrainians are the beginning of a new search, a desire to look at the problems from a new perspective. To find new solutions in practice by developing analytical observations and considering aspects that have not been previously considered in social and psychological work. For some, such perspectives may seem unusual or detached from the issues raised here. For some, perhaps, they seem pretentious because of their originality.

However, some will find insights and research novelty in these perspectives. Whatever the case, the author’s thoughts are at least worthy of discussion. Most likely, they are an experiment. And ultimately (and why not?) — they could be useful for future in-depth research. In any case, the latest views are always inspiring, and not only the patient but also the doctor will benefit from this because it is for him that the efforts made should lead to success. In our case, success should be a two-way street.

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