



Traditional dress and ethnic characters in the peoples of Central Asia: an ethnological analysis

Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek

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Annotation

In this article, the traditional clothing of the peoples of Central Asia as a system of ethnic characters is analyzed from an ethnological point of view. The author considers clothing not only as an aesthetic or practical phenomenon, but as a complex semiotic system that represents ethnic identity, indicates social status, and carries cultural memory. The study provides a comparative analysis of the specific ethnic characters — color, patterns, jewelry, headdresses — of Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik traditional clothing. Based on a semiotic approach (Barthes, Eco) and ethnological theories (Barthes, Turner), clothing is explored as a means of delineating ethnic boundaries and visually expressing ethnic identity.

Keywords: ethnology, clothing, ethnic characters, semiotics, doppelgänger, atlas, embroidery, ethnic identity, social status, visual anthropology.

Annotation

This article analyzes the traditional clothing of the peoples of Central Asia from an ethnological point of view as a system of ethnic signs. The author considers clothing not only as an aesthetic or practical phenomenon, but also as a complex semiotic system that expresses ethnic identity, indicates social status and carries cultural memory. The study presents a comparative analysis of the specific ethnic signs of the traditional clothing of Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks - color, pattern, jewelry, headdresses. Based on the semiotic approach (Barthes, Eco) and ethnological theories (Barthes, Turner), clothing is studied as a means of defining ethnic boundaries and visual expression of ethnic identity.



Keywords: ethnology, clothing, ethnic signs, semiotics, skullcap, atlas, embroidery, ethnic identity, social status, visual anthropology.

Abstract

This article analyzes the traditional clothing of the peoples of Central Asia from an ethnological perspective as a system of ethnic signs. The author considers clothing not only as an aesthetic or practical phenomenon, but also as a complex semiotic system that expresses ethnic identity, indicates social status and carries cultural memory. The study provides a comparative analysis of the specific ethnic signs of Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik traditional clothing - color, pattern, jewelry, headdress. Based on the semiotic approach (Barthes, Eco) and ethnological theories (Barth, Turner), clothing is studied as a means of defining ethnic boundaries and visually expressing ethnic identity.

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Log in

Clothing is not only the material that covers the body, but also the most visible and most immediately recognizable means of human self-expression.¹ From the perspective of ethnological science, clothing is a complex semiotic system in which ethnic identity, social status, religious beliefs, and aesthetic values are reflected.

The peoples of Central Asia — Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmens — have rich and colorful clothing traditions. The national clothes of these peoples are so different from each other that by means of a single dress or shirt style, it was possible to determine which nation a person belonged to, from which region he belonged, and even to which social stratum.

In Roland Barthes's *The Fashion System* (1967), clothing is analyzed as a "language" and its semiotic structure is revealed.² As Barthes shows, clothing performs not only practical, but also communicative function: through clothing, people "talk" to each other about their social status, cultural belonging and values.

In this article, the clothing of the peoples of Central Asia is considered through this semiotic and ethnological prism.

¹ Geertz C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. — New York: Basic Books, 1973. — B. 5–22.

² Barthes R. *The Fashion System*. — New York: Hill and Wang, 1983. — B. 10–30.



Research Objectives

1. Analysis of the main elements of traditional Uzbek clothing (doppi, chapan, satin shirt, embroidered belt) as ethnic characters.
2. To reveal the symbolism of color and pattern in the clothing of the peoples of Central Asia and to determine their ethnic meaning.
3. Study of indicators of social status, age and marital status through clothing.
4. Comparative analysis of traditional Central Asian clothing, identifying commonalities and differences in the clothing of Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks.
5. Assessing the Relevance of Traditional Clothing to Preservation and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Context.

Analysis of literature on the topic

Roland Barthes's work *The Fashion System* (1967) serves as a major theoretical source for the study of the semiotics of clothing.³ Barthes analyzes their syntactic and semantic structure, likening dress codes to language codes.

Humberto Eco's *The Theory of Semiotic Analysis* (1976) shows methods of semiotic analysis of objects of material culture.⁴ According to Eco's theory, every cultural object — including clothing — has its own denotative (direct) and connotative (complementary, cultural) meanings.

Fredrik Barth's work *"Ethnic Groups and Boundaries"* (1969) shows that ethnic identity is formed through ethnic boundaries.⁵ As Barth points out, clothing is the most visible ethnic boundary marker, and it is a visual means of separating "us" and "them."

The Uzbek ethnographer L. Chvyr *"Clothes of the peoples of Central Asia"* (1989) describes in detail the traditional clothes of all the indigenous peoples of the region.⁶ Chvyr explores each nation's clothing tradition in its historical, economic, and cultural context.

³ Barthes R. *The Fashion System*. — New York: Hill and Wang, 1983. — B. 10–30.

⁴ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. — Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. — B. 25–48.

⁵ Barth F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. — Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1969. — B. 9–38.

⁶ Chvyr L. *Sredneaziatskie xudojestvennye tkani*. — Moscow: Nauka, 1977. — B. 30–65.



Research methodology

The first method is visual anthropology. The semiotic meaning of clothing elements is determined by analyzing photographs of traditional clothing, museum exhibits, and images in works of art.⁷

The second method is semiotic analysis. On the basis of Barthes' and Eco's theories, the denotative and connotative meanings of the elements of clothing are analyzed.

The third method is comparative ethnological analysis. The dress traditions of the peoples of Central Asia are compared with each other, and elements belonging to the common Central Asian cultural heritage and specific ethnic elements of each people are distinguished.

The fourth method is archival and museum research. Exhibits and archival materials of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Museum of National Costume are studied.⁸

The fifth method is interview and interview. Interviews will be conducted with artisan seamstresses, clothing historians and those who wear traditional clothing.

Analysis & results

1. Doppi is the brightest sign of the Uzbek ethnic identity

Doppi is the most important element of Uzbek traditional clothing, which has become the main visual means of defining ethnic identity. Through the shape, pattern, and color of the dungeon, it was possible to determine what area a person was from, which social stratum he or she belonged to, and sometimes even what profession he or she was.

Fergana valley dopies are decorated with delicate patterns with white embroidery on a black background. Samarkand doves are often rectangular in shape with geometric patterns. Bukhara hoods are round and decorated with corum. Khorezm hoodies, on the other hand, are distinguished by their red-green color combination.

In terms of Barth's theory, the doppi was one of the most effective means of visually marking the ethnic boundary: the person wearing the doppi was immediately identified as an Uzbek, and this recognition reinforced the ethnic identity.

2. Atlas and Adras: The Language of Colors

⁷ Banks M. Visual Methods in Social Research. — London: Sage, 2001. — B. 12–28.

⁸ Chvyr L. Sredneaziatskie xudojestvennye tkani. — Moscow: Nauka, 1977. — B. 30–65.



Traditional Uzbek textiles — especially satin and adras — are considered to be one of the brightest examples of Central Asian culture.⁹ Atlas is a silk fabric whose color combinations and patterns carry ethnic, regional, and social information.

According to Barthes semiotics, a woman wearing a satin conveys a certain cultural message, not just aesthetic pleasure. The color combinations — red and blue, yellow and green — are not random, they are rooted in regional and ethnic traditions.

The city of Margelon, the main center of Uzbek atlas weaving, has preserved its unique patterns and color traditions for centuries. These traditions have been passed down from artisans to apprentices, forming an important part of the ethnic cultural heritage.

3. Embroidery: Ethnic Aesthetics and Spiritual Symbolism

Embroidery is one of the oldest and most developed handicrafts of the Uzbek people. Patterns in embroidery — flowers, birds, geometric shapes — are not only decorative, but also have a deep symbolic meaning.

Aperture patterns — eye contact protection; pomegranate pattern — abundance and prosperity; Tulip pattern — beauty and spring. The symbols represent the cosmological visions and ethnic values of the Uzbek people.

From the point of view of eco symbolism, embroidery patterns have a two-level meaning: the first level is visual decoration; The second level is cultural and ethnic symbolism. This second degree is fully understood only by those who belong to this culture.

4. Comparative analysis: Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik clothing

Between the dress traditions of the peoples of Central Asia there are both commonalities and important differences.

Kazakh and Kyrgyz traditional dress reflect a nomadic way of life: spacious, free, comfortable for riding on horseback. Kyrgyz kalpak — ak-kalpak — is the brightest ethnic symbol of nomadic culture. Uzbek clothing, on the other hand, reflects the more delicate textiles and embroidery traditions that developed in the pastoral cities.

Tajik traditional clothing shows the influence of the Persian culture: more long straight-cut dresses, different types of headdresses. These differences are a vivid example of the visual expression of ethnic identity through clothing.

⁹ Chvyr L. Sredneaziatskie xudojestvennye tkani. — Moscow: Nauka, 1977. — B. 30–65.



Conclusion

The traditional clothing of the peoples of Central Asia is not just a set of materials and colors, but a complex semiotic system that encodes an ethnic identity. Through the fabric of the dress, satin, embroidery and other clothing elements the Uzbek people have passed on their ethnic identity, social status and cultural values from generation to generation. The retreat of traditional clothing from everyday life in modern conditions creates the problem of preserving this ethnic memory, and this issue stands as an important scientific task before the science of ethnology.

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