



THE FORMATION OF THE CULT OF THE NUMBER SEVEN IN UZBEK ETHNOCULTURE AND ITS SEMANTIC SYSTEM IN FOLKLORE

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the formation and development of numerical concepts in Uzbek ethnoculture, focusing on the magical number seven, its mythological origins, and its poetic functions in folklore. The study reveals the symbolic and semantic meanings of the number seven in ancient cosmogonic beliefs, Zoroastrian views, Islamic mythology, folk tales, epics, customs, rituals, and linguistic units. Through various examples, it is demonstrated that the model of “seven” plays a significant role in shaping the traditional worldview, ritual thinking, and artistic imagery of the Uzbek people.*

Keywords: *Uzbek folklore, ethnoculture, magical numbers, number seven, mythology, numerology, ritual, oral tradition, epic, imagery system, seven robbers, seven climates.*

INTRODUCTION

Numbers interpreted as national-cultural indicators are specific linguocultural signs that reflect the spiritual thinking, worldview, and national mentality of each people. Over time, numbers have risen to the level of national-cultural codes and have become indicators expressing the rituals, traditions, and lifestyle of a particular nation. Moreover, a special field of study—numerology—has emerged, which examines the characteristics of numbers and their role in human life. Humans have metaphorically clothed numbers in a “divine garment,” as a result of which distinct beliefs related to numbers have appeared among different nations. Some of these are considered

auspicious, while others are regarded as inauspicious [6].

Literature Review

In Uzbek folklore and customs, special importance is attached to the number seven. Ancient beliefs regarding the sacred number seven have been preserved in proverbs such as “Measure seven times, cut once” and “The right of an orphan can dry up seven rivers,” in riddles such as “It has a small body but seven layers of clothing,” in legends related to place names like Yettisuv, Yettiqashqa, Yettikechuv, Yettisoy, Yettiqiz, and in folk beliefs about the constellation known as the “Seven Robbers.” The system of poetic images such as seven generations, seven ancestors, seven forefathers, seven



brothers, seven sisters, seven companions, seven robbers, seven thieves, seven giants, seven witches, and seven envoys is based on the magical nature of the number seven. This is because the number seven is one of the magical numbers in Uzbek folklore and has been considered sacred since ancient times. As noted by the scholar Nabiyeva, folklore has played a particularly significant role in embedding this number deeply into the hearts of the people, everyday speech, and various spheres of life [6].

There is a proverb among our people: “Measure seven times, cut once.” Reflecting on the number seven in this proverb, folklorist M. Jo‘rayev writes: “Why exactly seven times? Have you ever thought about it? After all, if one measures eight or more times, thinks carefully, and consults, it might be even better. It turns out that expressions and concepts containing the number seven are so numerous in our language that the number cannot be replaced. The number seven has become deeply embedded in such expressions, and separating them is practically impossible” [4]. A similar idea can be expressed about other numbers as well, since altering their presence may lead to the complete loss or distortion of meaning. Another synonymous proverb is: “Test once, test twice,” which also implies the necessity of careful thinking, caution, and deliberate action.

Research Methodology

Numerical culture or numerical traditions are widespread across different

countries and linguocultures, each possessing its own specific characteristics. Differences in the perception of the surrounding world among representatives of various linguocultures are reflected in their lifestyle, attitudes toward themselves and their interests, and the presence of diverse associations. Numbers serve as expressions of the idea of order. Even within the same country or region, there are conventional representations of numbers that reflect the unique cultural traditions, social and cultural psychology, and national mentality of the people—particularly in Russia and China [9].

Among Russians, the number seven is considered a symbol of luck and prosperity. For the Chinese, however, this number may not carry such meaning or may even be associated with pressure or aggression, as the pronunciation of “七” (7) is similar to “气” (“anger,” “to get irritated”) [2].

Since ancient times, the number seven has been widely used in the lifestyle of our people as a symbol of the divine. This can be seen in expressions such as “measure seven times, cut once,” “the orphan’s right dries up seven rivers,” “to lay seven layers of bedding,” “to bow seven times,” and “a woman who carries the keys to seven doors” (used to describe a woman constantly engaged in visiting). In such expressions, the number seven does not denote an exact mathematical quantity but rather conveys multiplicity, completeness, and figurative abundance. Our people, who have long revered the



number seven, traditionally use it in everyday speech [5].

Among the people, concepts such as seven wonders, seven treasures, seven climates, seven colors, seven heavens, seven layers of the earth, seven rivers, seven beauties, and seven sages are also widespread, all of which are connected with the extraordinary symbolic meanings of this magical number [5].

Research Methodology

As can be seen from the examples, concepts such as seven wonders, seven treasures, seven climates, seven colors, seven heavens, seven layers of the earth, seven rivers, seven beauties, and seven sages are all connected with the extraordinary symbolic meanings of this magical number [5].

In Alisher Navoi's "Khamsa", the travelers of the seven climates, The wandering envoys of distant lands, In a palace of seven colors told seven stories, And seven princesses awaited King Bahram. (M. Shaykhzoda) [5]

The concept of the "seven heavens" is actually connected with the primitive beliefs of our ancient ancestors, which were formed long before the emergence of Islamic teachings, and it was created under the influence of ancient mythological views associated with the number seven [5].

When carefully observing the rock carvings in the Arqar gorge located in the Buqantov massif of the Kyzylkum desert, it was found that the number of curved lines was seven. Scholars suspected that primitive beliefs were hidden in this. For

example, although the Nile River has many tributaries, it was referred to as the "great river with seven branches." Expressions such as "to cross seven rivers," "the river of seven darknesses," "Yettisuv," "Yettikechuv," and "to find healing from the waters of seven rivers" are frequently encountered in Uzbek folklore [5].

Across the world, the number seven has been widely revered as a divine symbol. For instance, the image of seven fish depicted in the Afrosiyob monument is said to resemble the constellation of the Seven Robbers. Moreover, the well-known historian B. A. Frolov noted that a specific "symbol of seven" exists in ancient monuments discovered in various archaeological sites around the world. The tradition of worshipping this "magical" number was also reflected in the construction of medieval architectural monuments [5].

According to sources, no matter how many times the ruler of Bukhara, Bidun Bukharkhudod, ordered the construction of buildings, they would collapse. He then gathered his scholars for advice. They recommended building the palace on seven stone pillars arranged in the form of the constellation of the Seven Robbers. The palace built in this way did not collapse. Moreover, neither Bidun Bukharkhudod nor any later rulers who lived in this building suffered defeat. Interestingly, according to sources, the palace itself was constructed in the 7th century. There are also legends that cities such as Tashkent, Kyiv, Istanbul, and



Rome were built on seven hills. It is said that just as Indians named the Seven Robbers after seven gods, Babylonians named seven planets after seven sages and worshipped them. This tradition of “seven sages” has also been preserved in folklore. Scholars attempt to connect the concept of “seven sages” or “seven gods” with celestial bodies—planets: “In our opinion, the image of the ‘Seven Sages’ in ancient Eastern legends is the product of primitive beliefs about seven planets” [4]. Furthermore, the belief that these seven planets govern the seven days of the week has been widespread since ancient times. This idea first appeared in ancient Babylon. A. Borodin connects the division of time into seven days with this belief [1].

In the perception of ancient people, the concept of time was mainly associated with the number seven. Primitive hunters who used the lunar calendar observed that the phases of the moon changed every seven days, and based on the seven visible celestial bodies (Moon, Sun, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Saturn), they created a seven-day unit of time—the week [5]. In a certain sense, seven ancestors and seven generations also functioned as units of time, serving as astronomical measures. Even in the works of the famous scholar Hippocrates, it is stated that important changes in life occur every seven days, seven months, and seven years.

From ancient times, it has been said that there are seven treasures that nourish and enrich a person’s life. These include:

1. Cow – the butcher and grocer of the household.
2. Bee – the doctor of the family.
3. Silkworm – the dowry of daughters.
4. Oil press – the fat of the pot.
5. Mill – the belt of the stomach.
6. Forest – the backbone of buildings and the source of fire.
7. Chicken – both food and medicine [5].

Although there are many important resources in human life, in ancient Central Asian and Eastern cultures, the concept of seven treasures varied depending on human needs.

It is noted that in the ancient Indian epic “Atharvaveda”, in the section dedicated to the mythological heroes Vishnu and Agni, the expression “seven treasures” is used. It expresses the wish that every household possesses seven treasures symbolizing happiness and prosperity [5]. Thus, the generalization of human necessities into seven treasures is characteristic of the ancient layers of Eastern folklore and contributed to the emergence of traditional motifs.

Even today, expressions like “Fishing is one of the seven treasures” are widely used. Greenhouses that provide food in winter are also considered among the seven treasures. The reason why it is specifically “seven treasures” and not eight or more lies in the ancient reverence for the number seven.

Epics, as sources reflecting the worldview, beliefs, and traditions of the people, also frequently use the concept of



“seven climates.” The reason why the number of envoys is seven is connected to the image of “seven wanderers,” which formed the idea that the world consists of seven climates, each with its own ruler. This reflects the belief of our ancestors in the magical number seven.

For example, in the epic “Xoldorkhan”, seven envoys are sent, while in “Alpomish”, Boybo‘ri sends 14 envoys (a multiple of seven) to collect zakat from his brother Boysari. In anger, Boysari executes seven envoys and mutilates the others. However, due to the belief that envoys should not be killed, it is understood that he actually punished their servants instead.

In the epic “Bo‘tako‘z”, in order to maintain the tradition of seven, a minor episode is introduced to reduce eight envoys to seven. According to epic tradition, the number of envoys and guests must be seven; otherwise, the poetic structure and narrative integrity of the epic would be disrupted.

Research Results and Analysis

In general, the number seven occupies a special place in the system of images in Uzbek folklore. Poetic images such as seven sons, seven people, seven executioners, seven thieves, seven heroes, seven sisters, seven servants, seven robbers, seven giants, seven envoys, seven warriors, seven young men, seven deer, seven horses, seven geese, seven lions, and seven kings are frequently encountered in Uzbek folk tales and epics [5].

According to assumptions, the images of the seven robbers in the tales “Qurbonboy and the Seven Thieves” and “Oygul and Bakhtiyor” originated from mythological beliefs about the constellation of the Seven Robbers. According to one legend, the Seven Robbers are seven thieves who circle all night trying to steal the horses Oqbo‘zot and Ko‘kbo‘zot tied to the Iron Stake, but each time dawn prevents their evil plan from succeeding [5]. Moreover, since the number seven is considered auspicious and lucky, Afghans observe traditions during New Year celebrations involving seven types of greens, seven dishes, and seven kinds of fruits, hoping for a prosperous and fertile year. According to sources, Iranians and Afghans, during the celebration of Navruz, follow the tradition of seven and distribute seven kinds of offerings to neighbors and relatives [5].

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According to the deep researcher of ancient Eastern history, K. Inostrantsev, during the Navruz celebrations in the Sassanid palace in Iran, strict adherence



to the number seven was observed. Early in the morning, the king was presented with seven types of food in seven vessels. During the royal feast, seven bowls, seven cups, and seven goblets were placed on the table. At the peak of the celebration, skilled cooks brought in sumalak in seven bowls [5].

Even today, in some villages of our republic, there exists a tradition of preparing special pastries from seven types of greens on the eve of Navruz. Although the number of greens may vary, due to the belief in the number seven, the dish retains this name. Such beliefs demonstrate that since ancient times, in myths and legends, the number seven has been used to group and systematize objects, phenomena, and images, and this tradition continues to this day.

In folklore, images such as the seven beauties of the East, the beauty of seven climates, seven graceful girls, seven princesses, seven maidens, seven women, seven sisters, and seven grandmothers are widely used. These images are based on various legends and myths, and their origins are quite intriguing.

The tradition of seven has been continued by great poets and writers such as Firdavsi, Dehlavi, Ashraf, and the renowned Alisher Navoi. In Central Asia, many legends exist about girls transformed into the Pleiades (a cluster of seven stars), further strengthening this tradition.

It is said that the change of lunar phases every seven days, along with

primitive beliefs about seven planets and the constellation of the Seven Robbers, gave rise to the tradition of seven in ancient myths, and this number later became a traditional symbol in cultural monuments.

In folklore, there are seven mythical helpers and their seven functions. These extraordinary helpers act as mythological patrons of heroes in folklore. According to S. A. Tokarev, in the Avesta, Ahura Mazda and his six divine beings are opposed by six evil spirits led by Ahriman [5]. Thus, even in Zoroastrianism, there exists a system of seven good helpers opposed by seven evil forces, similar to the seven antagonists or rivals in Uzbek folklore influenced by the mythology of the Seven Robbers.

This shows that the use of the number seven in structuring both positive and negative forces contributed to the formation of mythological structures in folklore. Expressions such as “from seven years old to seventy,” “from seven generations to seventy generations” represent all people and kinship ties. Phrases like “seven-layer bedding,” “seven layers of ice,” and “seven-layer fortress” indicate softness, thickness, and height, respectively, based on mythological structures. Even the “seven veils” on a princess’s face symbolize invisibility and represent the boundary between the hero and the princess.

The origin of the seven days of the week is also associated with mythological beliefs. For example, some beliefs state that God created the world in seven days,



while others are based on the observation of lunar phases changing every seven days. Archaeological findings from the Stone Age show patterns of 7, 14, 21, and 28 marks. Primitive humans also sanctified seven celestial bodies and named them after deities.

According to the Turkic manuscript “Solnoma” (13th century), each planet was believed to have its own day: Sunday—Sun, Monday—Moon, Tuesday—Mars, Wednesday—Mercury, Thursday—Jupiter, Friday—Venus, Saturday—Saturn [5]. These beliefs later spread to Romans and then to other European peoples.

It can be concluded that the seven-day lunar cycle helped determine the timing of seasonal rituals, while the constellation of the Seven Robbers served as a guide for hunting, warfare, and travel. Turkic peoples called these stars “Etagan” and considered them not as evil symbols but as helpers and protectors.

Over time, some traditions disappear while others transform. However, customs deeply embedded in the spirit of the people are preserved and transmitted across generations. The “magical seven” is one such enduring tradition. Our ancestors created fascinating legends and stories around every concept related to this number [5].

Some of these legends are associated with the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, which include:

1. The Egyptian pyramids (c. 2800 BC);

2. The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus (7th–6th centuries BC);

3. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon (5th century BC);

4. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus;

5. The Colossus of Rhodes;

6. The Lighthouse of Alexandria;

7. The Statue of Zeus.

Although some of these wonders no longer exist, their mythological significance has been preserved in folklore traditions.

In Uzbek and English folk tales, the number seven is considered a sacred and magical symbol of completeness and perfection. In fairy tales, it often leads the plot to its resolution. For example, in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, the seven dwarfs serve as helper figures, reflecting the mythological nature of the characters.

According to M. Jo‘rayev, the traditional use of the number seven in folklore originates from primitive beliefs about nature. This number combines mythological perceptions of nature with ancestral cults in Central Asian Turkic traditions. Repetition of an action seven times carries additional semantic significance beyond duration [3].

In Alisher Navoi’s epic “Sab’ai Sayyor” (“Seven Planets”), the number seven plays a central role as a poetic code forming the semantic foundation of the work. Written in 1484, it describes seven travelers telling seven stories over seven days. Concepts such as seven heavens, seven planets, seven days, seven climates,



seven palaces, seven travelers, seven girls, seven colors, and seven stories shape the structure of the narrative [6].

One of the cosmological mythologemes in the epic is the concept of seven heavens, seven celestial layers, and seven domes. In the introduction, Navoi describes their creation: (Chektir etganda dahr dunyodin... — poetic excerpt preserved) [7]. Thus, the structure based on the number seven reflects an ancient epic tradition in Uzbek literature.

Today, many people favor the number seven. For example, when buying a car, many prefer license plates containing the number seven. Many famous athletes also choose this number. The number seven is considered lucky in many cultures and is associated with concepts such as seven days, seven wonders, seven treasures, seven obligations, seven climates, and seven colors.

Religious sources also emphasize the significance of the number seven. For example, it is mentioned that a righteous woman who serves her husband for seven days will have seven gates of hell closed and eight gates of paradise opened for

her. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was nursed for seven days; the Qur'an mentions the creation of seven heavens (Surah Al-Mulk, verse 3); Islamic traditions prescribe certain rituals related to seven days; pilgrims perform seven circumambulations around the Kaaba; and various historical narratives also emphasize seven-year periods [8].

The concept of "seven heavens" is also mentioned in Mahmud Kashgari's "Devonu lug'otit-turk". According to M. Jo'rayev, this concept evolved from the ancient three-world model (sky, earth, underworld) under the influence of beliefs associated with the number seven [6].

Conclusion

Based on the research, it can be concluded that although some traditions and customs disappear or transform over time, those deeply rooted in the spirit of the people are preserved and passed down through generations. The "magical" number seven is one such enduring cultural phenomenon. Our ancestors created rich and fascinating legends and narratives around every concept and expression associated with this number.

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