

IRSTI 18.07.21

COLOR AS A SYMBOL OF THE NOMADS OF KAZAKHSTAN

J.S. BEKTIYAROVA 

(Almaty Technological University, Kazakhstan, 050012, Almaty, Tole bi str., 100)

Corresponding author's email: jamil-com@mail.ru

Color symbolism plays a pivotal role in the culture of Kazakh nomads, reflecting their worldview, environmental conditions, and social norms. This article examines the meanings of key colors (white, black, red, blue, gold, and yellow) in Kazakh culture. Particular attention is given to the analysis of phraseological units, language, mythology, and decorative arts, revealing unique aspects of color interpretation in the context of nomadic life. White is associated with purity, justice, and sacredness, while black symbolizes ambivalence, combining mourning and strength. Red conveys energy, passion, and power; blue is linked to the sky and divine origins; gold represents elite status, and yellow reflects the steppe, movement, and freedom. The analysis highlights the unique features of Kazakh color symbolism compared to other cultures, where the meanings of colors can differ significantly. The practical significance of this study lies in the application of color symbolism in modern design, textile industries, and graphic arts, contributing to the preservation and reinterpretation of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage. Future studies could delve into regional nuances and their influence on contemporary perceptions of color. Thus, the article emphasizes the importance of color as a means of cultural identification and a tool for integrating traditions into modern design practices.

Keywords: color symbolism, Kazakh culture, nomads, phraseological units, design, sacred colors, cultural heritage.

ТҮС ҚАЗАҚСТАН КӨШПЕНДІЛЕРІНІҢ СИМВОЛЫ РЕТІНДЕ

Д.С. БЕКТИЯРОВА

Алматы технологиялық университеті,
(Қазақстан, 050012, Алматы, Төле би көш., 100)

Автор-корреспонденттің электрондық поштасы: jamil-com@mail.ru

Түс символикасы Қазақстан көшпенділерінің мәдениетінде маңызды рөл атқарады, олардың дүниетанымын, табиғи жағдайларын және әлеуметтік нормаларын бейнелейді. Бұл мақалада қазақ мәдениетіндегі негізгі түстердің (ақ, қара, қызыл, көк, алтын және сары) мағыналары қарастырылады. Негізгі назар фразеологиялық бірліктерді, тілді, мифологияны және сәндік-қолданбалы өнерді талдауға аударылып, түстердің көшпелі өмір салтындағы түсіндірілуінің ерекше қырлары ашылады. Ақ түс тазалықты, әділеттілікті және қасиеттілікті білдіреді, ал қара түс амбиваленттілікті бейнелейді, яғни аза мен күштің үйлесімін көрсетеді. Қызыл түс қуаттылықты, құштарлықты және билікті білдірсе, көк түс аспанмен және құдайлық бастаулармен байланысты. Алтын элиталық мәртебені білдіреді, ал сары түс дала, қозғалыс және еркіндікті бейнелейді. Талдау нәтижелері қазақ түс символикасының басқа мәдениеттермен салыстырғанда бірегей ерекшеліктерін көрсетеді, онда түстердің мағыналары едәуір ерекшеленуі мүмкін. Зерттеудің практикалық маңызы заманауи дизайнда, тоқыма өнеркәсібінде және графикалық өнерде түс символикасын қолдану мүмкіндігінде жатыр, бұл Қазақстанның мәдени мұрасын сақтауға және қайта қарауға ықпал етеді. Болашақ зерттеулер аймақтық ерекшеліктер мен олардың қазіргі заманғы түс қабылдауға әсерін тереңірек зерттеуге бағытталуы мүмкін. Осылайша, мақала түс атаулыны мәдени сәйкестіктің маңызды құралы және дәстүрлерді қазіргі дизайнерлік тәжірибеге біріктірудің тиімді тәсілі ретінде атап көрсетеді.

Негізгі сөздер: түс символикасы, қазақ мәдениеті, көшпенділер, фразеологизмдер, дизайн, қасиетті түстер, мәдени мұра.

ЦВЕТ КАК СИМВОЛ КОЧЕВНИКОВ КАЗАХСТАНА

Д.С. БЕКТИЯРОВА

(Алматинский технологический университет,
Казахстан, 050012, Алматы, ул. Толе би, 100)

Электронная почта автора-корреспондента: jamil-com@mail.ru

Цветовая символика играет важную роль в культуре кочевников Казахстана, отражая их мировоззрение, природные условия и социальные устои. В данной статье исследуется значение основных цветов (белый, черный, красный, синий, золотой и желтый) в казахской культуре. Основное внимание уделено анализу фразеологических единиц, языка, мифологии и декоративно-прикладного искусства, что позволило выявить уникальные аспекты интерпретации цвета в контексте кочевой жизни. Белый цвет ассоциируется с чистотой, справедливостью и сакральностью, в то время как черный символизирует амбивалентность, сочетая значения траура и силы. Красный выражает энергию, страсть и власть, синий связан с небом и божественным началом, золотой символизирует элитный статус, а желтый отражает степь, движение и свободу. Анализ также выявил уникальные особенности казахской символики цвета в сравнении с другими культурами, где значение цветов может существенно различаться. Практическое значение исследования заключается в возможности применения цветовой символики в современном дизайне, текстильной промышленности и графическом искусстве, что способствует сохранению и переосмыслению культурного наследия Казахстана. Будущие исследования могут быть направлены на более глубокое изучение региональных особенностей и их влияния на восприятие цвета в современной культуре. Таким образом, статья подчеркивает значимость цвета как средства культурной идентификации и инструмента для интеграции традиций в современную дизайнерскую практику.

Ключевые слова: цветовая символика, казахская культура, кочевники, фразеологизмы, дизайн, сакральные цвета, культурное наследие.

Introduction

Color plays a key role in the perception of the world and cultural identity. For Kazakh nomads, as for other traditional cultures, colors held both aesthetic and symbolic meanings, reflecting their worldview, environmental conditions, and social norms. The relevance of this study lies in the need for an in-depth exploration of the color symbolism of nomadic culture, which can be leveraged for both the preservation of cultural heritage and contemporary design solutions.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the symbolism of colors within the context of Kazakhstan's nomadic culture and its connection to phraseology, mythology, and aesthetic traditions. The study's main objectives are:

- Identifying the meanings of key colors (white, black, red, blue, gold, and yellow) in Kazakh culture;
- Analyzing their use in language, art, and daily life;
- Interpreting the results within the context of cultural identity.

Literature Review

The study of color symbolism across various cultures has drawn significant scholarly attention. M. Luscher, in his work *Color and Your Character*, links color perception to the functions of higher and

primitive brain areas, emphasizing their role in emotional and cognitive responses [1]. In a cultural context, color symbolism has been widely examined through archaic triads: white, red, and black, which, according to studies, were the first colors named by ancient peoples [2, 3].

In Kazakh culture, color symbolism carries sacred significance. Research by Z.K. Karakuzova and M.Sh. Khasanov emphasizes the importance of white, black, and mixed colors in Kazakh language and folklore. These studies focus on the role of colors in rituals and daily life [4, 5]. Analyzing Kazakh phraseological units, K.Zh. Elibayeva identifies categories where colors are associated with sacredness, beauty, prosperity, and other concepts [6, 7].

Notably, A.K. Akishev's studies explore the connection between color, mythology, and Saka art [8]. His work highlights the roles of red and gold in portraying power and sacred spaces. Additionally, colors such as blue often link to celestial and divine forces, as supported by analyses of Turkic mythology [9].

Existing research provides a rich foundation for studying color symbolism in Kazakh nomadic culture but requires further interpretation, particularly concerning its impact on modern art and design. This study seeks to address this gap.

Materials and Methods

A comprehensive methodological approach was applied to achieve the research objectives, including:

1. Analysis of literature and folklore data.

Key works on color symbolism were analyzed, with a focus on Kazakh culture, mythology, and phraseology. Particular attention was given to publications by A.K. Akishev, Z.K. Karakuzova, M.Sh. Khasanov, and others studying the historical and cultural aspects of color usage [8, 4, 5].

2. Study of Kazakh phraseological units.

Phraseological expressions containing color-related lexemes were analyzed using data from Kazakh-Russian dictionaries and tables compiled by K.Zh. Elibayeva and other authors [6, 7]. This helped identify key semantic categories reflecting both positive and negative connotations.

3. Comparative cultural analysis. The uniqueness of Kazakh color symbolism was assessed by comparing the meanings of colors in other cultures, including Turkic, Slavic, and Western European traditions. Binary color categories were also analyzed within this framework [10, 9].

4. Visual analysis. Materials from Kazakh decorative arts, including ornaments, textiles, jewelry, and traditional clothing, were examined for their color palettes and symbolism.

5. Interpretation of findings for modern design. The results were contextualized within contemporary design trends, including the use of color palettes in interiors, textiles, and graphic arts.

This methodology provided a holistic understanding of the role of color in Kazakh nomadic culture and its symbolism in modern contexts.

Results and discussion

The analysis of Kazakh nomadic color symbolism revealed the following key aspects:

1. White (ақ). White in Kazakh culture is associated with purity, sacredness, justice, and blessings. It symbolizes divine origins, spiritual purity, and social nobility. Phraseological units such as *ақ жол болсын* (“bright road ahead”) and *ақ ниет* (“pure intentions”) demonstrate the positive connotations of white [4, 5]. In rituals, white often symbolizes good fortune and purity.

2. Black (қара). Black represents ambivalence. On one hand, it is linked to mystery, mourning, and danger, as illustrated by the phrase *қара көшпені* (“black migration”), which refers to times of hardship. On the other hand, black is

associated with dignity and sanctity, as seen in the expression *қара шаңырақ* (“sacred home”) [10, 6].

3. Red (қызыл). Red symbolizes energy, strength, love, passion, and life. It has an ancient history and belongs to the archaic triad [2, 3, 10]. Active, energetic, attractive, dynamic, passionate, and aggressive are epithets associated with “red” [11]. It is often paired with gold in symbols of authority and status. Red is prominently featured in traditional rituals, such as weddings, where it signifies happiness. Historically, red indicated power (e.g., Genghis Khan’s “red arrows”).

Positive meanings:

қызыл гүл – A flower representing love and beauty.

қызыл тіл [12] – Eloquence.

Negative meanings:

қызыл көз [13] – Anger and aggression.

қызыл қырғын [12] – Slaughter or war.

2. Blue (көк). Closely tied to the sky (*Tengri*), blue symbolizes divine origins. It represents stability and well-being in Kazakh culture.

Examples:

көк аспан – The sky, a symbol of divine protection.

көктемдей құлпырған [13] – A metaphor for blooming and renewal. However, blue may also carry negative connotations, as seen in curses like *көктей солғыр!* (“may you wither unripe”) [6, 7].

1. Gold and Yellow (алтын, сары). Gold signifies power, wealth, and high status. It was historically used in burial rituals to symbolize elite belonging.

Examples:

алтын асықтай – Graceful and refined (positive).

алтын шыққан жерді белден қаз – To dig for treasures where they exist.

Yellow has a broader spectrum of meanings, from freedom (e.g., *сары дала* – “wide steppe”) to sorrow (*сары уайым* – “deep melancholy”) [14].

The results illustrate that Kazakh color symbolism reflects both natural and social aspects of life, playing a significant role in language, art, and ritual practices.

The findings emphasize the rich symbolic role of colors in Kazakh nomadic culture, shaped by natural conditions, historical events, and societal structures.

1. Connection to natural and social contexts

○ White, symbolizing light and purity, reflects sanctity and justice, values central to nomadic society.

- Black embodies the duality of life, encompassing mourning and dignity.

- Red, associated with fire and blood, represents life energy, strength, and love, making it essential in rituals and adornments.

2. Role in language and culture

- The analysis of phraseological units shows that color symbolism permeates the Kazakh language, expressing emotions and social categories. Words like *ақ* (white) and *қара* (black) are often used metaphorically to describe moral qualities or situations.

- Binary color oppositions, such as white and black, illustrate contrasts like light and darkness, good and evil, while showcasing the unique flexibility of Kazakh symbolism.

3. Color and sacredness

- Blue and gold, linked to the sky and sun, highlight divine elements in Kazakh cosmology. Their use in shamanic rituals and ceremonial attire underscores their sacred significance.

- Yellow, symbolizing the steppe and movement, reflects the nomads' bond with vast landscapes, emphasizing the importance of freedom and homeland.

4. Comparison with other cultures

- Comparative analysis reveals unique aspects of Kazakh color symbolism. For instance, black often holds positive connotations, contrasting with Western cultures where it predominantly signifies negativity. This highlights the need for a contextual approach to studying color symbolism.

2. Relevance to modern design

- The identified aspects of color symbolism can be incorporated into modern design. Using color schemes rooted in Kazakh traditions can inspire unique interiors, textiles, and graphic products. By integrating sacred and cultural meanings, designers can preserve and recontextualize cultural heritage in contemporary settings.

Conclusion

Color symbolism represents a vital element of Kazakhstan's nomadic cultural heritage, reflecting their worldview, environmental realities, and social values. The study identifies the core meanings of primary colors (white, black, red, blue, gold, and yellow) and their interpretations within Kazakh culture.

- White symbolizes purity, justice, and sacredness.

- Black encompasses ambivalence, spanning from mourning to protection.

- Red conveys energy, passion, and authority.

- Blue and gold emphasize divine and sacred connections.

- Yellow represents the steppe and freedom.

A comparative analysis with other cultures underscores the uniqueness of Kazakh color symbolism, blending universal and localized meanings. This highlights the need for further research into color symbolism as a means of preserving cultural heritage.

The findings have practical implications for modern design, offering novel approaches to incorporating traditional colors into graphics, textiles, and interiors. Such applications could support both the preservation and reinterpretation of nomadic cultural heritage in contemporary contexts.

Future studies may focus on narrower contexts, such as folk art, rituals, or specific regional traditions, to further uncover the significance of color in Kazakhstan's culture.

REFERENCES

1. Люшер М. Цвет вашего характера. Режим доступа URL: https://www.koob.ru/lusher/cvet_vashego_haraktera (дата обращения 02.04.2022).
2. Психология цвета. Ч. 1. Первобытная цветовая триада и ее семантика. Черный, белый, красный. Режим доступа URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KCvTpsvyBM> (дата обращения 02.04.2022).
3. Дюпина, Ю.В. Символизация как один из аспектов феномена цвета // Молодой ученый. – 2012. – № 5 (40). – С. 280-281. – URL: <https://moluch.ru/archive/40/4765/> (дата обращения: 11.05.2022).
4. Стасевич И. Ювелирные традиции у казахов. Режим доступа URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TTY4WGQTaQ&list=PLILolnpAJOX5axqBMztfGB5MFszDOvvW-&index=11 (дата обращения: 11.05.2022).
5. Аксёнова И.Н. Цветовой символизм. Режим доступа URL: http://www.rusnauka.com/14_ENXXI_2013/Philologia/1_137953.doc.htm (дата обращения 18.05.2022).
6. Елибаева К.Ж. Символика и семантика цвета в казахской культуре // Вестник МГУКИ, №4 (48) 2012. – 60-67 с.
7. Меркибаев Т., Нурбаева А. История изучения понятия бинарности в мифологии // Вестник КазНПУ им. Абая, серия «Филология», №2(72), 2020 г.
8. Акишев А.К. Искусство и мифология саков. Издательство «Наука» Казахской ССР. 1984, 176 с.

9. Касенова К.Б. Символика цвета в казахском ковроткачестве: историко-культурологический анализ. Вестник КазГУКИ, №2 2017. – 55-57 с.

10. Тэрнер В. Символ и ритуал. – М.: Наука, 1983. – 278 с.

11. Бектиярова Д.С. Практикум по эксподизайну. – Алматы: Нур-Принт, 2021. – 150 с.: ил.

12. Казахско-русский словарь. Режим доступа URL: <https://classes.ru/all-kazakh/dictionary-kazakh-russian-term-15027.htm> (дата обращения 18.05.2022).

13. Фажукэ Абудужэхемань. Цветовые системы в английском, казахском и китайском языках. Выпускная квалификационная работа. Санкт-Петербург, 2021. Режим доступа URL: https://dspace.spbu.ru/bitstream/11701/30905/1/VKR_Fazuke_Abuduzeheman_FINAL.docx.pdf (дата обращения 18.05.2022). – 34-37 с.

14. Казахско-русский словарь. Режим доступа URL: <https://classes.ru/all-kazakh/dictionary-kazakh-russian-term-21414.htm> (дата обращения 18.05.2022).

REFERENCES

1. Lyusher M. Tsvet vashego kharaktera. [The Color of Your Character]. URL: https://www.koob.ru/lusher/cvet_vashego_haraktera (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)

2. Psikhologiya tsveta. Ch. 1. Pervobytnaya tsvetovaya triada i yeye semantika. Chyornyy, belyy, krasnyy. [The Psychology of Color. Part 1. The Primitive Color Triad and Its Semantics: Black, White, Red]. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KCvTpsvyBM> (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)

3. Dyupina, Yu.V. Simvolizatsiya kak odin iz aspektov fenomena tsveta [Symbolization as One of the Aspects of the Phenomenon of Color] // Molodoy uchenyy. – 2012. – № 5 (40). – P. 280-281. – URL: <https://moluch.ru/archive/40/4765/> (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)

4. Stasevich I. Yuvelimye traditsii u kazakhov. [Jewelry Traditions of the Kazakhs]. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TTY4WGQTaQ&list=PLILolnpAJOX5axqBMztfGB5MFszDOvvW-&index=11 (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)

5. Aksyonova I.N. Tsvetovoy simbolizm. [Color Symbolism]. URL: http://www.rusnauka.com/14_ENXXI_2013/Philologia/1_137953.doc.htm (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)

6. Elibaeva K.Zh. Simvolika i semantika tsveta v kazakhskoy culture. [Symbolism and Semantics of Color in Kazakh Culture] // Vestnik MGUKI, №4 (48) 2012. – 60-67 p. (In Russian)

7. Merkibaev T., Nurbayeva A. Istoriya izucheniya ponyatiya binarnosti v mifologii. [The History of Studying the Concept of Binarity in Mythology] // Vestnik KazNPU im. Abaya, seriya "Filologiya", №2(72), 2020. (In Russian)

8. Akishev A.K. Iskusstvo i mifologiya sakov. [The Art and Mythology of the Saka]. Izdatel'stvo "Nauka" Kazakhskoy SSR. 1984, 176 p. (In Russian)

9. Kasenova K.B. Simvolika tsveta v kazakhskom kovrotkachestve: istoriko-kul'turologicheskiy analiz. [Color Symbolism in Kazakh Carpet Weaving: A Historical and Cultural Analysis]. Vestnik KazGUKI, №2 2017. – 55-57 p. (In Russian)

10. Terner V. Simvol i ritual. [Symbol and Ritual] – М.: Nauka, 1983. – 278 p. (In Russian)

11. Bektiyarova J.S. Praktikum po expo-dizaynu. [Practical Course in Expo Design] – Almaty: Nur-Print, 2021. – 150 p. (In Russian)

12. Kazakhsko-russkiy slovar'. [Kazakh-Russian Dictionary]. URL: <https://classes.ru/all-kazakh/dictionary-kazakh-russian-term-15027.htm> (date accessed: 29.11.2024).

13. Fazhuke Abuduzhekheman'. Tsvetovye sistemy v angliyskom, kazakhskom i kitayskom yazykakh. Vypusknaya kvalifikatsionnaya rabota. [Color Systems in English, Kazakh, and Chinese Languages]. Sankt-Peterburg, 2021. URL: https://dspace.spbu.ru/bitstream/11701/30905/1/VKR_Fazuke_Abuduzeheman_FINAL.docx.pdf (date accessed: 29.11.2024). – 34-37 p. (In Russian)

14. Kazakhsko-russkiy slovar'. [Kazakh-Russian Dictionary]. URL: <https://classes.ru/all-kazakh/dictionary-kazakh-russian-term-21414.htm> (date accessed: 29.11.2024). (In Russian)