

**NATIONAL SYMBOLS AND IDENTITY: A COMPARISON BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES**

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*This article analyzes the national symbols of Japan and the USA and their role in the formation of national identity. In the study, based on comparative and cultural approaches, the content, historical roots, and cultural functions of the symbols of the two countries were studied. Japanese symbols - sakura, Mount Fuji, kimono, tea ceremony - represent traditionality, spiritual harmony, and natural beauty, while US symbols - flag, Bald Eagle, Statue of Liberty - reflect freedom, independence, and civic unity.*

**Introduction**

In the current period of intensifying globalization processes, national symbols and the concepts of identity are acquiring more important socio-cultural significance than ever before. The uniqueness of each nation is embodied in its historical experience, traditions, customs, language, religion, and symbols. In this regard, national symbols are not only aesthetic or political signs, but also manifest themselves as an important spiritual code in the self-awareness of the people, in the formation of national pride. The interpretation of

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symbols in the culture of different countries, their place in public consciousness, is also different, which reflects the mentality and historical development of the people. A comparison of the content and originality of national symbols, using the example of Japan and the USA, is of particular scientific interest. Because Japan is a society that has preserved its national traditions for centuries and is intertwined with religious and philosophical values such as Confucianism, Sintoism, and Buddhism, while the USA is a multinational country formed on the basis of liberal-democratic values, known by the «melting pot» model. Therefore, their methods of expressing national identity through national symbols - flags, anthems, historical figures, architecture, national clothing, cultural symbols - differ sharply.

### Literature review

Issues of national symbols and identity have been widely studied in the fields of cultural studies, sociology, semiotics, and philosophy, and each direction approaches this concept differently. In general, the works of A. Smith (1991) and B. Anderson (1983) are the main theoretical source in the study of national identity. In his work «The Ethnic Origins of Nations», A. Smith connects national identity with a system of historical memory, language, customs, and symbols. Anderson, in his famous work «Imagined Communities», defines a nation as an «imagined community», emphasizing that symbols, language, and media are central to the formation of national unity [Anderson, 1983]. The semantic and communicative significance of national symbols is also explained through a semiotic approach. R. Barthes (1964) in his work «Mythologies» analyzes symbols as a «secondary system of meaning» in culture, that is, through symbols, society has the opportunity to encode and retransmit its values. Similarly, Clifford Geertz (1973) considers cultural symbols as a means of interpreting social experience and emphasizes that they shape the moral and religious worldview of society.

In the study of Japanese culture, the research of E. Hall (1976) and R. Benedict (1946) is an important source. In Hall's «Beyond Culture», Japan is described as a «high-context culture», where symbols, gestures, and nonverbal signs are presented as an integral part of national identity. R. Benedict, in his work «The Chrysanthemum and the Sword» (1946), puts forward the concept of «shame culture» of Japanese culture and substantiates the strengthening of social order and moral values through national symbols. The works of R. Bellah (1985) and Samuel Huntington (2004) play an important role in the study of US identity and symbols. In his article «Civil Religion in America», Bellah emphasizes that

national symbols in the USA - the flag, oath, presidential speeches, religious texts - have the power to unite society as a symbol of civil religion. Huntington, in his work «Who Are We?», shows that the idea of American identity is based on English Protestant values, symbols of individualism and freedom.

In studies comparing Japanese and American symbols, many modern authors (e.g. Iwabuchi 2002; Watanabe, 2018; Edwards, 2014) study the transformation of symbols in the context of transnational culture and global brands. In his work «Recentering Globalization» (2002), Iwabuchi showed that Japanese symbols (animé, manga, sushi, kimono) acquire the characteristic of a «cultural hybrid» in global consumption. Also, the symbols of the USA - Hollywood, Statue of Liberty, Bald Eagle, McDonald's - reflect national identity on an international scale as a means of cultural export (Edwards, 2014). In modern research, the dynamic nature of national symbols and their functional role in political and economic processes are also widely covered. For example, Tomlinson (1999) in his work «Globalization and Culture» emphasizes that in the context of globalization, national symbols become a means of «cultural resistance» and «self-preservation». Therefore, the comparison of symbols of Japan and the USA is a relevant scientific issue not only in the historical or aesthetic context, but also in the context of global communication.

### **Methodology**

Comparative, culturological, and semiotic analysis methods were used in the research. The content of the national symbols of Japan and the USA, the factors of their formation, and their role in expressing national identity were analyzed. The article is based on theoretical sources and open cultural materials. The historical roots of symbols, their modern interpretation, and function in the consciousness of the people were studied using a contextual approach. As a result, the commonalities and differences between the symbols and identity of both countries were identified, and their significance in intercultural communication was scientifically substantiated.

### **Results and discussion**

The national symbols of Japan and the USA have significant differences in terms of content, the process of formation, and their role in expressing national identity. Japanese symbols, first of all, represent traditionalism, harmony with nature, and spiritual balance. For example, sakura flowers are valued by the Japanese people as a symbol of the transience of life, beauty, and renewal. Mount Fuji is a symbol of purity, patience, and inner strength, and koi is a symbol of endurance and luck. Cultural symbols such as the tea ceremony,

kimono, origami, or bonsai also express the philosophy of Japanese aesthetics - the pursuit of simplicity, harmony, and perfection. These symbols clearly demonstrate the culture of the Japanese people, based on the principles of inner worldview, discipline, collectivism, and respect for nature. The symbols of the USA mainly represent the ideas of freedom, independence, and democracy. The stars and stripes on the flag represent the unity of states, the Bald Eagle symbolizes power and freedom, and the Statue of Liberty symbolizes the ideas of human rights and justice. In the USA, the concept of the «American Dream» is at the center of national identity - this dream means the opportunity for every citizen to achieve success through their own labor. National symbols, as a visual expression of this dream, unite the people. Similarly, symbols such as apple pie, baseball, cowboy images, and July 4th celebration are elements representing the American way of life, national pride, and unity.

Japanese symbols are based more on internal aesthetic harmony and collectivism, while US symbols promote individual freedom and civic values. In Japanese culture, symbols are expressed calmly, philosophically, and nonverbally; In the USA, they are loud, monumental, and mass-produced. For example, the Japanese tea ceremony symbolizes inner peace and attention, while the American tradition of singing the national anthem in sports arenas expresses a sense of mass solidarity and pride. As a result of globalization, the symbols of both countries have gone beyond their borders and become international cultural symbols. Japanese symbols - sakura, kimono, sushi, anime - have become distinctive features of Japanese identity in world culture today. The symbols of the USA - Hollywood, Statue of Liberty, McDonald's, Silicon Valley - are a powerful tool for promoting the American way of life and the ideology of freedom on a global scale. At the same time, this process leads to the commercialization of symbols, and sometimes to the simplification of their original meaning.

In Japan, symbols are more traditionally combined with modernization: kimono designs are blending with modern fashion, and sakura festivals have become a means of developing global tourism. In the USA, symbols strive for universality, uniting representatives of different nationalities around a single idea - civic unity. In this respect, the experience of both countries represents two different models of preserving and adapting national identity in a global context. National symbols are not only a historical heritage, but also a means of self-awareness of the people, unification of society, and formation of an international image. Japanese symbols express inner spiritual harmony and aesthetic modesty, while US symbols

express external power and freedom. Each of them performs an active communicative function in the global cultural space while preserving national identity. Therefore, national symbols continue to play an important role in the development of intercultural dialogue, diplomacy, and international mutual understanding.

### Conclusion

As a result of comparing the symbols of Japan and the USA, it was revealed that national symbols in both countries represent the historical experience, values, and self-awareness of the people. Japanese symbols - sakura, Mount Fuji, kimono, and tea ceremony - reflect traditionalism, natural harmony, and spiritual tranquility. The symbols of the USA - the flag, the Bald Eagle, the Statue of Liberty - represent the ideas of freedom, democracy, and national unity. In Japan, symbols are based on internal aesthetic harmony and collectivism, while in the USA, they are based on individual freedom and civic pride. In the process of globalization, both of them have risen to the level of symbols that introduce national identity at the international level. Thus, the experience of Japan and the USA confirms the invaluable role of national symbols in self-awareness, intercultural dialogue, and the formation of an international image.

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