
THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF WHITE COLOR IN UZBEKISTAN AND
CHINA

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Colors are an important part of every culture. They are not just visual elements but also symbols that carry meaning and emotion. One of the most interesting colors is white, because its meaning changes from one country to another. This paper discusses how the white color is understood in two very different cultures Uzbekistan and China. Although modern life has brought some changes, these old beliefs still influence people's daily lives. By comparing these two cultures, the article shows how color symbolism reflects history, religion, and people's way of thinking.

Introduction

Colors are one of the simplest but most powerful ways people express feelings and ideas. We often don't even realize how much meaning a color can carry it can show love, sadness, peace, or danger. But what makes colors truly fascinating is that their meanings are not the same everywhere. Each culture has its own understanding of what colors mean, based on its traditions, religion, and history. In linguistics and cultural studies, colors are often analyzed

as part of a system of cultural signs. According to semiotic theory, each color acts like a word in a visual language, carrying specific meanings that depend on context. Scholars such as Roland Barthes and Clifford Geertz emphasized that colors help people communicate emotions and social values nonverbally. From this point of view, the color white can be seen as a “cultural code” that represents moral and emotional ideas shared by a group. This is why studying color meanings is not only interesting but also helps us understand how people from different nations perceive the world.

The color white is one of the best examples of this difference. In many parts of the world, especially in Western and Islamic cultures, white is seen as a symbol of purity, cleanliness, and peace. People wear white for weddings, religious holidays, and other joyful events. But in China, white has a completely different meaning it is linked to mourning and death. This difference may seem small, but it tells us a lot about how people in different societies see the world around them. This article looks at what the color white means in Uzbekistan and China. Both have long and rich histories, and both have given the color white a special place in their traditions. By comparing these meanings, we can better understand how culture shapes people’s emotions, beliefs, and communication.

In Uzbekistan, white has always been seen as a good and sacred color. It is connected with honesty, cleanliness, and kindness. Even in the Uzbek language, there are many phrases that use the word “white” (oq) in a positive way. For example, people say “oq niyat” to mean “pure intention,” “oq yo‘l” to wish someone good luck, or “oq yuzli” to describe a person who is honorable and respected.[4; 89p] These phrases show that for Uzbeks, white is not just a color it represents a person’s good heart and moral purity. In Uzbek folklore and literature, the symbolism of white appears frequently. In the epics and poems of Alisher Navoi, white light often symbolizes divine wisdom and purity of soul. In Uzbek fairy tales, heroes usually ride white horses, which stand for courage and righteousness. The word “oq” also appears in idiomatic expressions such as “oq sut” (mother’s milk), symbolizing gratitude and moral duty. These linguistic and cultural examples show that white is deeply rooted in the moral values and everyday communication of Uzbek people. White is also very important in Uzbek customs and celebrations. During weddings, the bride always wears a white dress, which symbolizes happiness and a new beginning. On religious holidays like Ramazon hayiti or Qurbon hayiti, people often choose clean, light-colored clothes to show that they are spiritually and physically pure. Another important symbol is oq non white bread. In Uzbekistan, bread is considered sacred, and

white bread in particular represents blessings, peace, and generosity. Offering white bread to guests is one of the greatest signs of hospitality and respect. People say that bread should never be thrown away because it carries the blessings of God. Even in daily life, white is associated with goodness and comfort. Many houses in Uzbek villages are painted white, as it represents light, calmness, and order. The idea of wearing white or keeping the home white and clean comes from both cultural and religious beliefs. Because of that, white in Uzbekistan has both a cultural and a spiritual meaning it connects outer appearance with inner goodness. From a linguistic viewpoint, these associations also affect communication and behavior. When an Uzbek says “May your path be white” (“Yo‘lingiz oq bo‘lsin”), the phrase is not only a wish but a symbolic blessing. It carries the idea that a person’s journey in life should be clean, honest, and successful. Thus, the symbolic meaning of white connects everyday language, ethics, and religion.

On the other hand, in China, the meaning of white is almost the opposite of what it is in Uzbekistan. Traditionally, white is the color of mourning, death, and sadness. When a person dies, their family wears white clothes to express grief and to honor the deceased. White ribbons, flowers, and funeral decorations are common during these ceremonies. Unlike in many other cultures, people in China do not wear black for funerals white is the color that represents loss and farewell.[3;55-67pp]

This connection between white and death comes from ancient Chinese philosophy. According to traditional beliefs, everything in the world is made up of five elements wood, fire, earth, metal, and water and each one is linked to a color. White is connected with metal, which represents the west and autumn, the time when life begins to fade and nature prepares for rest. Because of that, white became the symbol of the end of life and the transition to the spirit world.[5;112p] However, not all meanings of white in Chinese culture are negative. In philosophy, especially in the Yin-Yang theory, white stands for yang the bright, positive, and active force in nature. It represents light, clarity, and truth. But when it comes to everyday customs, the connection to death is still much stronger. In Chinese literature, the symbolic use of white is also complex. In ancient poems, white chrysanthemums are often associated with remembrance and loyalty to the dead. In classical novels such as “Dream of the Red Chamber,” white clothing or flowers appear in scenes of parting and sadness, representing both love and loss. In modern Chinese society, while the traditional meaning of white as a color of mourning remains, it is also seen as a sign of simplicity and purity. White weddings and white modern design have become more

common, especially among younger generations influenced by global culture. In modern China, things are slowly changing. Today, white is also seen as elegant, clean, and modern. Many young people wear white shirts or dresses, especially in cities, because it looks stylish and simple. White has also become popular in design, architecture, and technology think of white phones, cars, and minimalist interiors. So, while the traditional link between white and mourning is still respected, the new generation also sees white as a symbol of purity and modern life.

Globalization plays an important role in reshaping color meanings. The influence of Western fashion and digital media has made white a symbol of minimalism and progress in both China and Uzbekistan. For instance, the global popularity of white wedding dresses, white logos in branding (such as Apple or Samsung), and the rise of “clean” minimalist aesthetics show that the color has acquired universal associations with modernity and innovation. This demonstrates how traditional meanings coexist with new, global interpretations.

The way white is understood in Uzbekistan and China shows how deeply culture shapes the meaning of colors. In Uzbekistan, white brings to mind life, goodness, and hope. It is the color of beginnings of weddings, new journeys, and prayers. When someone says “oq yo‘l”, they wish you success, peace, and good luck. In China, white represents the opposite side of life the end of the journey. It is a color of quietness and remembrance, used when saying goodbye to loved ones. Yet, even in this context, white is not negative; it shows respect and peace toward those who have passed away. What connects both cultures is the emotional power of white. It is not just a visual color but a symbol with deep emotional meaning. In both countries, white represents purity but in different ways. For Uzbeks, it means the purity of the soul and good intentions, while for the Chinese, it means the purity of death, when the soul leaves the world peacefully.[2; 14p] Because of globalization, the meanings of colors are becoming more flexible. In both Uzbekistan and China, white now also represents simplicity, elegance, and modern life. People use it in fashion, advertising, and interior design because it looks clean and calm. Still, traditional meanings remain strong, especially in ceremonies and family customs. The color white may look the same everywhere, but its meaning depends on culture, history, and belief. In Uzbekistan, it stands for honesty, kindness, and peace it is the color of life and hope. In China, it symbolizes mourning, death, and remembrance the color of endings. Both interpretations show that white is not just a color; it carries emotion, belief, and deep symbolism. Understanding these cultural

meanings helps people communicate better and avoid misunderstandings. For example, giving white flowers as a gift may be a good gesture in Uzbekistan, but in China it might be seen as unlucky. Knowing these details shows respect and cultural awareness. White reminds us that colors are not only about what we see but also about what we feel. The same color can express both life and death, joy and sorrow and that's what makes culture so rich and fascinating.

Conclusion

In conclusion, studying the symbolic meaning of colors and particularly of white helps people improve intercultural communication and avoid misunderstandings. When individuals understand that the same color can mean life in one culture and death in another, they become more sensitive to cultural diversity. This kind of awareness is essential in modern global interactions such as business, diplomacy, and translation. Future research may explore how other colors, like red or black, vary in meaning across cultures. White, as both the color of life and death, continues to remind us that beauty and meaning are always shaped by culture.

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