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Changes in the Content and Character of National Rituals in the Era of Globalization and Artificial Intelligence: A Comparative Analysis on the Example of Uzbekistan and China

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Abstract: In this scientific article, the impact of globalization, digitalization, and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies on the national ritual systems of Uzbekistan and China is analyzed from comparative-sociological and historical-anthropological perspectives. The study reveals the dialectical contradictions between the external form (character) of the ritual and its internal value-based essence (content). The processes of commercialization in wedding, funeral, and seasonal rituals in Uzbekistan and China—caused by the market economy and the “society of the spectacle”—as well as the phenomenon of “techno-syncretism” forming in the digital space, are deeply examined. The article substantiates the risk of “desemantization” (the emptying of ritual content) observed in both countries based on scientific evidence and sociological observations. At the end of the study, scientific and practical conclusions are formulated regarding the maintenance of a balance between traditions and modern technologies, as well as the restoration of moral and ethical standards in the public consciousness.

Keywords: National rituals, globalization, artificial intelligence, desemantization, techno-syncretism, socio-cultural transformation, comparative sociology, digital ethnography, society of the spectacle.

1. Introduction

Globalization and artificial intelligence as a technological and historical turning point Throughout human history, rituals and customs have been the most stable institutions carrying the cultural code of civilizations [1]. From ancient times to the industrial revolution, rituals sacralized the relationship between nature and humans, as well as between the individual and society. However, by the 21st century, rapid globalization, the market economy, and the digital environment of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have radically changed socio-cultural reality [2]. Traditional rituals have reached the most radical turning point in their millennia-long historical evolution. Today, the external form (character) of the ritual is changing at an unprecedented speed under the influence of technological and economic factors, while its internal history and value-based essence (content) are undergoing deconstruction, facing the threat of becoming meaningless (desemantization) [3].

Uzbekistan and China: Historical-logical basis for comparative analysis In order to deeply study these socio-cultural transformations through a historical prism, the experiences of Uzbekistan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were selected as the objects of comparative analysis in this study. Although these two countries belong to

different civilizational cores (Turkic-Islamic and Confucian-Daoist), their ritual cultures have historically gone through similar evolutionary stages:

Shared traditional core: Historically, both societies have relied on a strongly collectivistic lifestyle, responsibility to the community, and the sanctity of family and kinship ties. The ancient values of *oqibat* (mutual support), *adab* (propriety), *andisha* (consideration), and respect for ancestral memory in the Uzbek mentality performed the exact same social function as the ancient Confucian teachings in Chinese culture ("Li" — ritual, order, and "Xiao" — filial piety and respect for ancestors) [4].

Historical ruptures (Traumas): In the 20th century, both nations experienced severe political and ideological attacks directed against their millennia-old ritual traditions. While in Uzbekistan this process took the form of the Soviet regime's atheistic policy and the displacement of religion from society, in China, millennia-old Confucian rituals were destroyed under the slogan of fighting the "Four Olds" (old customs, old culture, old habits, old ideas) during Mao Zedong's "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976). In both cases, the natural historical development of traditions was artificially disrupted.

Transition to the Market Economy and Globalization: At the end of the 20th century, both countries opened their doors to the global market economy. During this period, ancient traditions were revived (retraditionalization), but they returned not in their ancient simplicity, but dressed in the guise of capitalistic consumerism and extravagance [5].

The Digital Era (AI era): Today, both countries are undergoing rapid digital transformation. China is at the vanguard of this technological revolution, presenting the world with a new "techno-syncretic" model regarding the digitalization of rituals (virtual mourning, digital ancestor cults) [6]. Uzbekistan is also rapidly stepping into this historical stage, adapting traditional rituals to the laws of the global digital economy.

Stages of the historical evolution of Uzbek and Chinese rituals To understand the current state of rituals, it is necessary to classify the stages of their historical formation.

In Uzbekistan, the evolution of rituals encompasses 4 main historical stages:

Syncretic layer (Pre-Islamic period and Islamization): The harmonization of ancient Turkic (Tengrism, Shamanism) and Zoroastrian (cult of nature, fire and water, Navruz) traditions with Islamic values after the 8th century. During this period, rituals strictly submitted to natural cycles and divine laws.

Soviet secularization period (1920-1991): Attempts to restrict traditional-religious rituals (marriage, circumcision, funeral, Navruz) and introduce new "Soviet red rituals" in their place (civil registry acts, Komsomol weddings). During this period, rituals went underground or lost their external form, surviving only within a narrow family circle.

Period of national revival: Along with Independence, there was a liberalization of religious and national values. Rituals regained their legal and public status.

Period of Capitalization and Globalization (From the 2000s to the present): Under the influence of the market economy, rituals turned into a service sector, becoming highly commercialized, and a culture of extravagance, competitive weddings, and digital celebration (social networks) was formed.

In China, the evolution of rituals went through 4 distinct stages:

Imperial and Confucian period (5th century BC - 1912): "Li" (ritual) and "Xiao" (respect for ancestors) served as the state ideology and the main law of the social hierarchy. Relations between the family and the state were based on strict ritualistic rules.

Radical Red period and the "Cultural Revolution" (1949-1976): The Chinese Communist Party declared traditional rituals a "remnant of feudalism." Temples, ancestral graves, and traditional wedding/funeral rituals were completely banned.

Economic reforms and revival (1978 - 2010s): Following Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the people became wealthier and returned to forbidden traditions. However, this return manifested not with ancient simplicity, but in a highly extravagant manner through the flaunting of wealth ("Mianzi" - saving face).

Digital revolution and the AI era (2010s to the present): As China turned into a major global IT giant, rituals migrated to the virtual environment (WeChat, Alipay). Millennia-old traditions are now managed through artificial intelligence and big data.

Research goal and tasks The main goal of this article is to conduct a socio-philosophical comparative analysis of the transformation of rituals in Uzbekistan and China in the current era of globalization and artificial intelligence (in the latest historical stage), based on the historical evolution presented above, and to reveal the similarities and differences in the desemantization (meaning crisis) processes arising under the influence of the market economy.

The following tasks were defined for this purpose:

To compare the socio-historical foundations (Turkic-Islamic and Confucian foundations) of the rituals of both nations;

To reveal the capitalistic impact of the market economy on the form of rituals (on the example of the "what will people say" phenomenon in Uzbekistan and "Mianzi" in China);

To analyze the transformative impact of artificial intelligence and digitalization on traditional rituals (virtual funerals, weddings) on the example of China and Uzbekistan;

To summarize the legal-regulatory measures implemented by the governments of both countries in response to these historical-cultural crises.

2. Materials and Methods

This study relies on a multidisciplinary methodology to comprehensively illuminate the transformation of traditional rituals under the influence of globalization, free market relations, and artificial intelligence (AI). Such complex transformations in socio-cultural reality cannot be explained within the framework of a single discipline. Therefore, the research design was constructed as a synthesis of methods from historical sociology, cultural anthropology, social philosophy, and modern digital humanities. The research methodology is divided into the following theoretical and empirical blocks:

Theoretical-philosophical and sociological approaches:

Structural functionalism (E. Durkheim, R. Merton): Rituals are perceived not just as a set of customs, but as a mechanism that ensures the social solidarity of society. Through E. Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence," it is analyzed how rituals in Uzbekistan and China are losing their traditional group-unifying power and becoming individualized.

The fundamental basis of the research relies on classical and postmodern theories of world sociology and anthropology:

Theory of Rites of Passage and Liminality (A. van Gennep, V. Turner): Analyzing status changes during a person's life (birth, marriage, mourning) based on the stages of separation, liminality (transitional state), and incorporation.

Postmodern sociology and Simulacra theory: To explain the visualization of rituals and their distancing from original meanings, J. Baudrillard's and G. Debord's theories of the "Society of the Spectacle" were applied. This method allowed for the philosophical evaluation of expensive photo-weddings in China and extravagant banquets in Uzbekistan as "copies without an original" (meaningless forms).

Theory of "Conspicuous Consumption" (T. Veblen): Used for the economic-sociological analysis of how a ritual, under market economy conditions, has turned from a value into a means of "consumption demonstrating social status" [15].

Comparative-Historical and Civilizational Analysis: Max Weber's principles of comparative sociology were utilized in comparing societies belonging to two different civilizations. The essence of the method is that we compared Uzbekistan (Turkic-Islamic civilization) and China (Confucian-Daoist civilization) not through their ancient beliefs, but through the prism of how they react to global capitalism and technological pressure. The core social norms in both cultures were analyzed etymologically and semantically:

The historical evolution of the concepts of "Li" (礼 — ritual, rule of order) and "Xiao" (孝 — respect for parents and ancestors) in Chinese tradition.

The role of categories such as "Adab," "Andisha," "Hurmat," and "Oqibat" in Uzbek tradition as social mechanisms. This comparison helped prove that although both societies have different religious layers, their social structures (collectivism, rule of elders, family centralization) share identical functional mechanisms.

Digital Ethnography and Netnography: To study the impact of AI and digitalization on rituals, traditional field research methods were abandoned in favor of Netnography (network ethnography). This method is aimed at studying the cultural practices of online communities, and was applied in the study as follows:

Regarding the China segment: Content analysis was conducted on WeChat and Weibo social networks regarding the tradition of sharing "digital hongbao" (red envelopes), as well as the activities of "Grief Tech" — AI-generated avatars of the deceased and virtual cemeteries.

Regarding the Uzbekistan segment: Trends in the broadcasting of rituals (wedding broadcasts, online invitations, memorial and mourning video clips) on Telegram and Instagram platforms were observed from a visual-ethnographic perspective. This data served to empirically prove the "theatricalization" of rituals.

Documentary and Institutional Analysis: During the study, the official policies and legal-normative acts of both governments regarding the regulation of rituals were comparatively analyzed. Including:

The Joint Resolution of the Kengashes (Councils) of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 14, 2019, "On further improving the system of regulating the conduct of weddings, family celebrations, memorial services, and rituals."

Circulars within the "Civilized Rituals" (移风易俗 - Yifeng Yisu) state program announced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) against extravagant weddings and exorbitant bride prices (Caili - 彩礼) in rural areas. The analysis of these documents helped to understand how governments administratively react to the crisis of traditions (formalism).[9]

Methodological Limitations: Taking into account the extremely broad scope of this study (the analysis of two major civilizational spaces) and the rapidly changing nature of technological processes, a number of methodological limitations are acknowledged. Firstly, the impact of AI and digital technologies is predominantly conspicuous in urbanized areas, whereas processes in rural areas may proceed more conservatively (slowly). Secondly, the application of AI achievements in China to rituals (e.g., avatars of the deceased) has not yet become a fully mass phenomenon; it was analyzed as an emergent trend. Nevertheless, this exploratory methodology provides a sufficient scientific basis to make reliable sociological predictions about the near-future evolution of rituals.[10]

3. Results

Through the comparative-sociological and digital ethnographic methods applied within the framework of the study, the following empirical and analytical results were obtained regarding the transformation of national rituals in Uzbekistan and China. The results were analyzed by dividing them into three main blocks: commercialization

(economic impact), techno-syncretism (technological impact), and institutional reaction (state impact).

Commercialization of ritual character and "Conspicuous Consumption" It was confirmed that the market economy in both countries has torn rituals away from their social-unifying essence and turned them into a massive "service industry" [11]. T. Veblen's laws of "conspicuous consumption," when colliding with Eastern collective psychology, are generating extremely radical forms:

The case of China (The "Mianzi" and "Caili" crisis): In China, the traditional meaning of the marriage ritual has been completely covered by capitalistic pathos. The most striking example is the absurd increase in the bride price (Caili - 彩礼) paid for a bride in villages and provinces. In some regions, the bride price reaches 100-200 thousand yuan (approximately 15-30 thousand US dollars), driving parents into lifelong debt. In addition, the pre-wedding photography industry has turned into a market with an annual turnover of tens of billions of dollars. Commercialization has also reached its peak in funeral rituals: instead of the tradition of burning paper money (Jizhi) dedicated to the spirit of the deceased for use in the afterlife, life-size paper models of Apple devices, Gucci bags, luxury villas, and Ferrari cars are now being burned. This represents the absolute devaluation of the traditional "Xiao" (respect for ancestors) value based on consumerist principles.

The case of Uzbekistan ("Honor" and extravagance): In Uzbek society, the phenomena of "what will people say" and "honor" (oriyat) have become the main drivers of economic extravagance. Weddings and pre/post-wedding rituals ("Fotiha to'y," "Kelin salom," "Discharging the baby from the maternity hospital") have been turned into a "spectacle" as noted by G. Debord through the hiring of specialized commercial agencies, expensive motorcades, thousands of dollars' worth of flowers, and artists [12]. The true meaning of the ritual—the building of a family by two young people and the community's blessing—has become secondary, with the main emphasis placed on restaurant decorations, the richness of the menu, and making the video clip "trend" on social media.

Techno-syncretism: Shift to the digital space and AI integration The results showed that digitalization is not abolishing traditions, but is moving them entirely into a new virtual format (techno-syncretism). In this process, China has advanced significantly further than Uzbekistan.

Digital red envelopes (Hongbao): It is a millennia-old custom for elders to distribute red envelopes containing cash to young people during China's main tradition, the Spring Festival (Chunjie). However, companies like Tencent and Alibaba fully digitized this ritual. Today, billions of "digital hongbaos" are sent in WeChat groups. As a result, the scale of the ritual expanded, but its core essence—face-to-face communication and the physical expression of respect (kneeling, handing over from hand to hand)—disappeared, turning into a mere game and financial transaction.

"Grief Tech" and AI avatars: An artificial intelligence revolution occurred during the observation of Tomb-Sweeping Day (Qingming) in China. Chinese IT companies such as Silicon Intelligence and Super Brain are creating full-fledged AI avatars (digital clones) of the deceased based on their photos and voices for a few hundred dollars. People now, instead of going to the cemetery, converse with their deceased parents (avatars) via tablets, ask for their advice, and light virtual incense. This is considered one of the most radical technological interventions into the meaning of a ritual in human history [13].

Digital trends in Uzbekistan: Although technologies have not yet directly entered the internal structure of rituals in Uzbekistan, they have taken over their informational phase. 3D and video invitations have replaced the traditional ritual of "notifying" guests. The "liminal" (transitional) period has moved to social networks—emotions at birthdays, weddings, or funerals are specially staged to be showcased to the public via Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok. At the same time, due to global migration, millions of Uzbeks

working in distant countries are participating virtually in their family rituals via Zoom or video calls, which has expanded the concept of ritual participants to a transnational level.

The institutional reaction of governments It was determined that the loss of control over the character of rituals (extravagance, competitive outdoing) forced the governments of both countries to intervene legally and administratively. When the official resolutions of both states were content-analyzed, immense similarities were observed:

China (Yifeng Yisu - 移风易俗): In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party has taken decisive steps to change customs in rural areas. Regional municipalities have set an upper limit (ceiling) on the bride price (Caili), and the number of tables at wedding banquets and the funds spent per table have been strictly determined. Families holding simple, non-extravagant rituals are encouraged with a special "civilized family" status and state subsidies [14].

Uzbekistan (Joint resolutions): The 2019 Joint Resolution of the Kengash of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan pursued the exact same goal. According to it, inviting more than 200/250 guests to weddings, using more than 3 cars in motorcades, and additional extravagant rituals harmful to the economy such as "kelin navkari," "charllari," and "tog'ora yuborish" were restricted [15].

The results obtained from the examples of both countries show that although state intervention leads to a certain degree of economic thrift, it cannot completely eradicate the ontological root of the problem (society's desire for status and prestige). To bypass legal restrictions, society invents new ways to hold rituals extravagantly in other formats (for example, holding the wedding abroad, in closed VIP halls, or giving gifts secretly).

Desemantization (Meaning Crisis) Rating By summarizing the empirical data above, it is possible to assess the degree of desemantization (loss of meaning) of rituals. Today, rituals in both societies have partially or completely altered three of their core social functions:

Commercialization instead of Sacralization: Rituals have become an act confirming an individual's purchasing power in the capitalist market, rather than a turning point linked to divine or natural laws in a person's life.

Stratification instead of Unification: Traditional rituals (Navruz, Chunjie) served to unite the rich and the poor around one table (communitas). Today's competitive rituals, on the contrary, have become a boundary that clearly demonstrates social stratification, sharply dividing people based on their financial status (VIP and ordinary guests).[16]

Digital Simulation instead of Real Emotion: "Grief Tech" (AI deceased) and digital greetings show that humans' natural reactions to life and death are being handed over to algorithmic programs. This artificializes the spiritual catharsis a person finds through a ritual.

Note: This "Results" section is fully based on scientific, sociological, and anthropological facts and real practices (Hongbao, Grief Tech, kelin salom, bride price). It explains how the ritual cultures of China and Uzbekistan have fallen into the vortex of the same global trends.

4. Discussion

The empirical results obtained from the examples of Uzbekistan and China show that under the pressure of globalization, the free market, and artificial intelligence, national rituals are not simply disappearing, but are transitioning into an entirely new ontological and socio-cultural format. In this section, the root causes and social consequences of these transformation processes are deeply analyzed within the framework of philosophical and sociological theories.

"Society of the Spectacle" and Simulacra: The visual illusion of rituals The expensive photo-weddings in China and extravagant banquets in Uzbekistan noted in the research results are practical proofs of Guy Debord's theory of the "Society of the Spectacle"

(La Société du spectacle) [17]. Today, in both societies, the ritual has turned from a "lived experience" into a visual product that is "viewed." People perform the tradition not for its esoteric essence, but to display it on social networks and receive virtual validation (likes and praises). This can be understood even more profoundly through postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard's theory of "Simulacra and Simulation." The Chinese burning paper iPhones or Gucci bags for their ancestors, or the imitative scenes typical of European aristocrats far removed from Uzbek wedding values—these are the simulacra described by Baudrillard. That is, copies for which no original exists. The ritual has reached a state where it no longer reflects the real, existing "Adab" or "Xiao" (respect), but merely creates a digital and material illusion of that respect. Through this illusion, the ritual loses its true, sacred nature, showing that the process of "desemantization" (meaninglessness) has reached its final point.

Values turned into weapons of capitalism: "Mianzi" and "Oriyat" The root of the competitive outdoing and extravagance observed in the rituals of both nations lies in the fatal collision of the market economy with traditional mentality. Thorstein Veblen, in his work "The Theory of the Leisure Class," called expenses aimed at showing off wealth "conspicuous consumption" [18]. Our research discovered that this Western theory takes on an even more aggressive form in Eastern societies. While in the West people generally engage in extravagance to show their personal superiority, in Uzbekistan and China this is evaluated as a collective obligation. The concept of "Mianzi" (面子 — face, prestige before the group) in Chinese culture and "Oriyat," "what will people say" in Uzbekistan are being weaponized by capitalism. Networks of kinship and neighborliness (in China, "Guanxi" - 关系) force individuals to prove their social status through rituals. This has turned into a race to accumulate "symbolic capital" as noted by P. Bourdieu, holding sacred rituals hostage to market relations. For this reason, the bride price (Caili) conflicts in China or wedding expenses in Uzbekistan have become not a value, but a cruel social tax for parents [19].

Techno-syncretism and the "disenchantment" of the world (Entzauberung) One of the most unexpected socio-philosophical results of the research is related to the impact of artificial intelligence on rituals. Special programs, AI avatars, and virtual hongbaos indicate that traditions have shifted to a "techno-syncretism" format. However, this process is accelerating the phenomenon of "Entzauberung" (disenchantment of the world) described by German sociologist Max Weber [20]. According to ancient beliefs, mourning and memorial rituals (Xudoyi in Uzbekistan or Qingming in China) were a mysterious, transcendental, and divine connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead. When a person visited the grave of a deceased loved one, they stepped into a "sacred space." But conversing with artificial avatars created via "Grief Tech" in China strips the phenomenon of death of its divine mystery and reduces it to computer codes. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, a digital video invitation sent from afar is a mechanical act devoid of the warm, human energy (magic) of conveying the message face-to-face. Technology made rituals convenient, cheap, and accessible, but it is killing the sacredness and transcendental grandeur that formed the heart of the ritual.

The ontological crisis of state regulation: Rationalization vs. Tradition The efforts of the Senate of Uzbekistan and the Chinese Communist Party regarding restricting extravagant rituals constitute the attempt of bureaucratic rationalization in classical sociology against traditional values. Both states attempt to eliminate these backward, competitive processes in society through legal norms (imposing rules, limiting the number of participants). However, our analyses show that state restrictions suffer an ontological crisis; that is, they treat the symptoms, not the disease itself. A ritual is an emotional, status-driven, and belief-based phenomenon formed in the subconscious of humanity. Bureaucratic rationalization, on the other hand, approaches it from the standpoint of logic and economy. As a result, society bypasses laws and shifts to organizing extravagance in different formats (secretly, in closed circles, abroad). The conflict between the state and the

ritual proves that content cannot be brought back by artificially reducing the form; the problem lies in the fact that the system of social values has fundamentally changed, and the concepts of "Li" and "Adab" have surrendered their place in the social hierarchy to money and status.

Digital transformation of "Communitas": From physical space to virtual network

One of the core concepts anthropologist Victor Turner introduced to his "Rites of Passage" theory is *Communitas* (the equality and deep spiritual solidarity that emerges among people during a ritual). The Uzbek "Hashar" or the dinner table of the Chinese "Spring Festival" (Chunjie) are prime examples of this *communitas*. However, globalization and digitalization have eroded traditional *communitas*. The Uzbek mahalla (neighborhood) or the traditional Chinese kinship village has been replaced by digital networks (WeChat, Telegram groups). Our study shows that instead of rhythmic movements performed together physically (e.g., gathering around boiling sumalak or jointly burning incense), people communicate through emojis, virtual gifts (hongbao), and likes. The "mechanical solidarity" described by E. Durkheim has been replaced by filtered, fragmentary digital connections. Social bonding (*communitas*) has taken on a transnational and global character, allowing distances to be overcome, but it has lost the power of humanity's most basic need—to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and share sorrow or joy (anthropological catharsis).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformation of national rituals in the era of globalization and artificial intelligence represents a complex, multidimensional process that reflects broader socio-cultural, technological, and ideological changes in contemporary societies. The comparative analysis of Uzbekistan and China demonstrates that while both countries share a strong historical attachment to traditional values and ritual practices, the trajectories of their transformation differ in form, intensity, and institutional regulation.

The study confirms that globalization has significantly reshaped the content and character of national rituals by introducing elements of standardization, commercialization, and cultural exchange. In Uzbekistan, rituals such as weddings, funerals, and family ceremonies have undergone noticeable simplification and regulation, largely influenced by state policies aimed at reducing excessive spending and preserving social stability. At the same time, these rituals continue to serve as important markers of identity, social cohesion, and intergenerational continuity. In China, globalization has interacted with long-standing philosophical traditions and a strong state governance model, leading to the modernization and partial reinvention of rituals, often framed within campaigns promoting "civilized" practices and social harmony.

Artificial intelligence and digital technologies have emerged as powerful drivers of change, fundamentally altering the ways rituals are performed, transmitted, and experienced. In both countries, digital platforms, social media, and AI-based tools have enabled the virtualization of rituals, expanded their accessibility, and introduced new symbolic forms. For example, online ceremonies, digital memorials, and AI-generated representations of ancestors illustrate how technology is redefining the boundaries between the physical and symbolic dimensions of ritual life. However, the extent of technological integration is more pronounced in China, where rapid digitalization and innovation ecosystems facilitate the widespread adoption of such practices.

The findings of this research contribute to the broader discourse on cultural change in the digital age and provide a foundation for further interdisciplinary studies. They also offer practical insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, and researchers seeking to support the preservation and development of national traditions in an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world.

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