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SYMBOLIC MEANING OF KARAKALPAK NATIONAL COSTUME AND ITS APPLICATION IN DESIGNING A CONTEMPORARY CLOTHING COLLECTION

Kurbonboyeva Nilufar Islomboy qizi
E-mail: nilufarkurbanboyeva94@gmail.com

Annotatsiya. Maqolada qoraqalpoq milliy libosining ramziy ma'nolari etnografik manbalar, muzey kolleksiyalari tavsiflari va semiotik tahlil asosida tizimlashtirilgan. Liboslardagi yosh va ijtimoiy maqomni bildiruvchi belgilar, himoya (tumor) vazifasi, kosmologik naqshlar hamda "Qirq qiz" dostoni bilan bog'liq harbiy-epik obrazlar alohida guruhlarga ajratilgan. Ko'k ko'ylak, qizil va oq kiymeshek, jegde, saukele kabi unsurlar semantikasi asosida "Gulayim" nomli olti obrazdan iborat kapsula kolleksiyasi loyihasi ishlab chiqilgan. An'anaviy ramzlarni zamonaviy kiyimga ko'chirishda stilizatsiya, iqtibos va dekonstruksiya usullaridan foydalanish tartibi ko'rsatib berilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: qoraqalpoq libosi, kiymeshek, saukele, ko'k ko'ylek, jegde, semantika, naqsh, kolleksiya, dizayn, etnodizayn.

Аннотация. В статье на основе этнографических источников, описаний музейных коллекций и семиотического анализа систематизированы символические значения каракалпакского национального костюма. Выделены группы знаков, обозначающих возраст и социальный статус, охранительную (оберéговую) функцию, космологическую орнаментику, а также военно-эпические образы, связанные с дастаном «Кырк кыз». На основе семантики кок койлека, красного и белого кимешека, жегде и саукеле разработан проект капсульной коллекции «Гулайым» из шести образов. Показан порядок применения стилизации, цитирования и деконструкции при переносе традиционных символов в современную одежду.

Ключевые слова: каракалпакский костюм, кимешек, саукеле, кок койлек, жегде, семантика, орнамент, коллекция, дизайн, этнодизайн.

Abstract. The article systematises the symbolic meanings of the Karakalpak national costume on the basis of ethnographic sources, descriptions of museum collections and semiotic analysis. Four groups of signs are distinguished: markers of age and social status, protective (amuletic) elements, cosmological ornament, and martial-epic images connected with the epic "Qırq qız" ("Forty Maidens"). Drawing on the semantics of the kók kóylek dress, the red and white kiymeshek, the jegde and the saukele, a capsule collection "Gulayım" consisting of six looks has been designed. The paper shows how stylisation, quotation and deconstruction can be used to transfer traditional symbols into contemporary clothing without losing their meaning.

Keywords: Karakalpak costume, kiymeshek, saukele, kók kóylek, jegde, semantics, ornament, collection, fashion design, ethno-design.

INTRODUCTION

Clothing has never been only a means of protection from heat and cold. In traditional societies a costume works as a readable text: by looking at a woman's headdress, the colour of her dress or the pattern on her sleeve, members of the community could tell her age, marital status, kinship group and even the stage of her life she had reached. P. Bogatyrev, studying folk dress of Moravian Slovakia, described this as the coexistence of practical, aesthetic, ritual, social and regional functions in a single garment, where the "sign" function may become more important than the utilitarian one [1]. R. Barthes later showed that dress forms a system of meanings that can be described much like a language [2].

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The Karakalpak costume is a particularly clear example of such a system. The very ethnonym of the people – *qaraqalpaq*, "black hat" – refers to an item of dress, which shows how closely clothing and identity are tied together in this culture. Ethnographers of the twentieth century – T. A. Zhdanko, Kh. Yesbergenov, A. Bekmuratova and others – recorded the composition of men's and women's costume, the names of its parts and the rules of wearing them [3; 4; 5]. Recent research by Z. I. Kurbanova has traced how the costume changed from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century under the influence of new fabrics, urban fashion and Soviet everyday life [6]. A detailed visual and textual record of Karakalpak dress, jewellery and embroidery was published by D. and S. Richardson on the basis of museum and private collections [7].

Most of these works, however, describe *what* the costume consisted of and *how* it changed. Much less attention has been paid to the question of how its symbolic content can be transferred into modern clothing design so that the result is neither a museum copy nor a decorative imitation stripped of meaning. At the same time, the demand for such solutions is growing. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-5242 of 17 November 2017 set out measures for the further development of handicrafts and support of craftspeople, and the textile and garment industry of the country is being reoriented towards products with higher added value [8; 9]. National motifs give local designers a competitive identity, but only if they are used knowingly.

The **aim** of this study is to systematise the symbolic meanings of the main elements of Karakalpak traditional costume and to demonstrate, through the design of a capsule collection, a method of applying them in contemporary clothing. The objectives are: (1) to identify the semantic groups of signs in the Karakalpak costume; (2) to analyse the symbolism of colour and ornament in key elements – the kók kóylek, kiymeshek, jegde and saukele; (3) to develop principles for transforming these symbols into modern garments; (4) to present a collection concept and evaluate its consistency with the traditional semantic system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The source base of the study consists of three groups of materials. The first group includes ethnographic monographs and articles on Karakalpak material culture [3–6], as well as works on the regional features of Central Asian costume [10]. The second group covers descriptions and published photographs of costume items from museum collections – the I. V. Savitsky State Museum of Arts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the State Museum of Local Lore in Nukus, as well as the items reproduced in the album by D. and S. Richardson [7]. The third group consists of specialised publications on Karakalpak headdresses and embroidery, among them I. Bogoslovskaya's study of the kiymeshek [11] and A. Otemisov's work on Karakalpak crafts [12].

The analysis was carried out in several stages. At the first stage, the structural-functional method was used: the costume was divided into its components (headdress, dress, outer garment, decoration, ornament, colour), and for each component its practical and sign functions were determined in accordance with the approach of P. Bogatyrev [1] and the classification of dress proposed by J. B. Eicher and M. E. Roach-Higgins [13]. At the second stage, semiotic analysis made it possible to group the identified signs according to the type of information they convey. At the third stage, the comparative method was applied to separate features shared with neighbouring Turkic peoples from specifically Karakalpak ones [10].

The design part of the work relied on the method of the creative source, which is common in fashion design education. The selected source elements were transformed by means of four techniques: *stylisation* (simplifying a form or ornament while keeping its recognisable structure), *quotation*

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(transferring a fragment almost unchanged into a new context), *deconstruction* (dividing a traditional form into parts and reassembling them), and *combinatorics* (combining motifs from different costume elements). For each look of the collection, the source element, the motifs used, the technique of transformation and the colour solution were recorded in a design matrix, which allowed the authors to check how evenly the semantic groups are represented in the collection.

RESULTS

3.1. Semantic system of the Karakalpak costume. The analysis showed that the sign content of the costume can be grouped into four codes. The first is the *age and status code*. A Karakalpak woman's life was literally visible in her clothes: girls began to wear the dark blue kók kóylek dress at the age of about 15–16 [14], young married women wore the red qızıl kiymeshek, and elderly women wore the white aq kiymeshek of the same cut [15]. A married woman leaving the house had to throw a jegde – a cloak-like robe with false sleeves – over her head [6].

The second is the *protective code*. Silver jewellery, coral and turquoise inlays, amulets and small metal plates on the headdress were meant to guard the wearer. The plates on the saukele were called *qıran*, a word associated with a quick, sharp-sighted hunting bird [16]. The third is the *cosmological code* expressed in ornament: the cross and the vortex were linked to the solstice and the cardinal points, the zigzag to heavenly water, and the rhombus to fertility [17]. On the kiymeshek the rhombic form of the whole piece, seen at large scale, was also read as a symbol of motherhood [15]. The fourth is the *martial-epic code*. The helmet-like saukele and the "chain-mail" pattern on the kók kóylek recall the young warrior maidens of the epic "Qırq qız", whose heroine Gulayım is said to have been 15–16 years old – the same age at which girls put on the blue dress [14]. The main elements and their meanings are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Main elements of Karakalpak traditional costume and their symbolic meanings (compiled from [6; 7; 11; 14–17])

Costume element	Form and decoration	Symbolic meaning
Kók kóylek (dark blue dress)	Tunic-shaped dress with embroidered stripes angled towards the centre; "chain-mail" pattern on the rest of the field	Maidenhood and readiness for marriage; image of the warrior maiden of "Qırq qız"
Qızıl kiymeshek (red headdress-cape)	Hood with face opening; red breast part (aldı) richly embroidered; central strip orta qara	Young married woman; fertility and motherhood (rhombic form, cradle-like central strip)
Aq kiymeshek (white headdress-cape)	Same cut, white homespun fabric, vertical cross-stitch stripes	Elderly woman; dignity, purity, completed life cycle
Jegde	Cloak-robe with false sleeves, thrown over the head	Married status; modesty and protection outside the home
Saukele with tóbelik	Helmet-shaped headdress, metal plates (qıran), coral, long embroidered strip at the back	Bride's status; protection; martial-epic image of the helmet
Qara qalpaq (men's black hat)	Felt or sheepskin hat	Ethnic identity; name of the people

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Colour forms a separate layer of meaning. Old Karakalpak embroidery was dominated by crimson, balanced by brown, pistachio green and golden yellow [17]. In the costume system red is connected with youth and life force, dark blue with the maiden and the sky, white with old age and purity, and black – in the name of the men's hat – with the people as a whole. These colour oppositions are important for design because they allow a collection to "speak" even when the ornament is simplified.

3.2. The "Gulayım" capsule collection. On the basis of the semantic system described above, a capsule collection of six looks named after the heroine of "Qırq qız" was designed for young urban women and, in one look, for a unisex audience. The collection is not a reconstruction of the costume: each look takes one traditional element as its creative source and keeps its key meaning while changing its form, fabric and function. The design matrix is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Design matrix of the "Gulayım" capsule collection

Look	Creative source	Motifs used	Technique	Colour
1. Maxi dress	Kók kóylek	Rhombus, chain-mail, zigzag	Stylisation	Indigo, crimson accents
2. Hooded cape	Qızıl kiymeshek	Rhombus, horn, cross, zigzag	Deconstruction	Crimson, black
3. Draped coat	Jegde	Horn, zigzag, rhombus	Quotation of false sleeves	Pistachio green, crimson
4. Evening ensemble	Saukele	Bird (qıran), rhombus, chain-mail	Combinatorics	Black, silver
5. Long tunic	Aq kiymeshek	Cross, rhombus	Stylisation	White, natural linen
6. Unisex coat and hat	Shapan and qara qalpaq	Horn, zigzag, cross, bird	Combinatorics	Black, golden yellow

In look 2 the kiymeshek is deconstructed: the hood becomes a detachable element, and the embroidered breast part is turned into an asymmetrical front panel of a cape. In look 3 the false sleeves of the jegde are quoted almost literally, but they hang from the shoulders of a modern coat rather than from the head. Look 4 does not copy the saukele as a headdress; instead, its silhouette and the metal plates are transferred to a high structured collar, which keeps the "protective helmet" idea but removes the sacred wedding context. As Figure 1 shows, the rhombus, linked with fertility, appears in five of the six looks, while protective motifs are kept for the evening and unisex looks.

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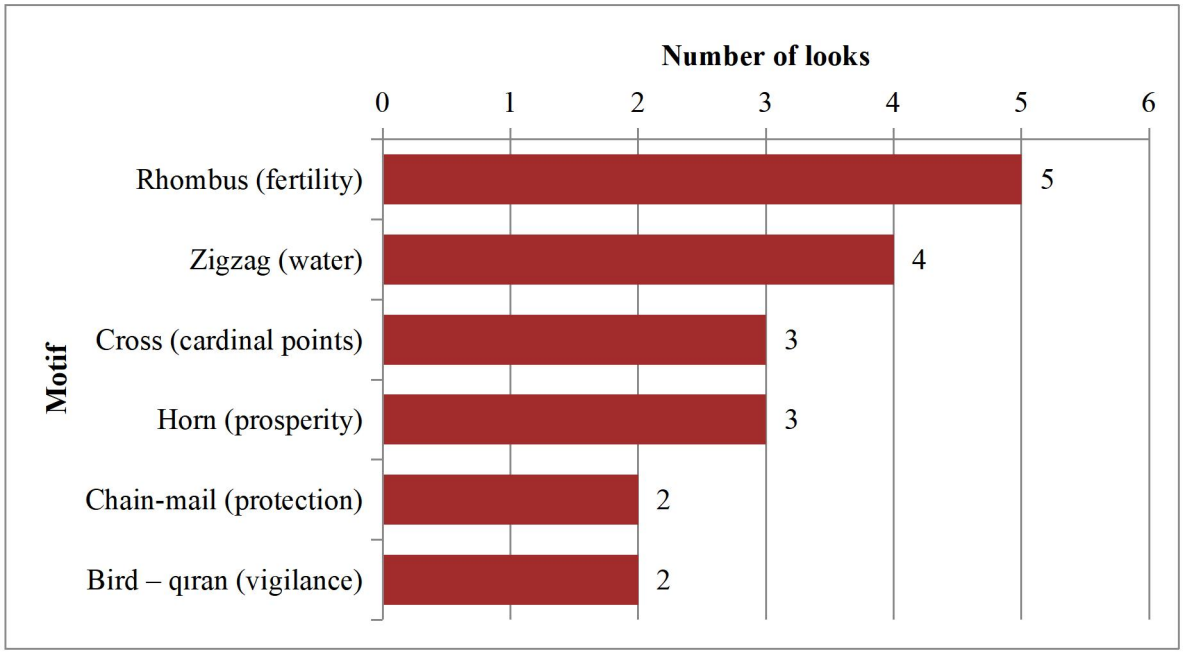


Figure 1. Frequency of traditional ornamental motifs in the six looks of the collection

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that the Karakalpak costume is not a set of isolated decorative details but a coherent system in which form, colour and ornament support each other. This agrees with the general view of Central Asian costume as a regional whole with distinct local variants [10], and with the description of Karakalpak women's dress as a record of age, status and needlework skill [7; 14]. For a designer, this systemic character is both a resource and a responsibility: a motif taken out of its system can easily turn into an empty ornament.

One of the key questions is how freely sacred elements may be used. The saukele and the kiymeshek were connected with the wedding and with the whole life of a woman; the kiymeshek, according to the custom recorded by I. Bogoslovskaya, was kept for the whole of life [11]. In the proposed collection this problem is solved by grading the degree of quotation. Elements with everyday meaning (the stripes of the kók kóylek, the false sleeves of the jegde) are quoted directly, while elements with ritual meaning (the saukele, the red breast part of the kiymeshek) are transformed through stylisation or deconstruction, so that their idea remains recognisable but the object itself is not reproduced as a costume prop.

Kurbanova's study shows that the Karakalpak costume has always absorbed innovations – factory fabrics, new cuts, urban garments – without losing its identity [6]. The approach used here continues this line: modern materials and silhouettes are combined with a stable core of meanings. A practical advantage of such collections is their connection with local crafts. Chain-stitch and cross-stitch embroidery, which still exist in Karakalpakstan, can be used for limited series, which is in line with state policy on supporting craftspeople [8].

The study has limitations. The collection has been developed at the level of concept and design matrix; the next step is to produce prototypes and to test consumer perception among young people in Nukus and Tashkent, as well as to discuss the designs with embroiderers and museum specialists.

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CONCLUSION

1. The symbolic content of the Karakalpak traditional costume can be described through four codes: age and status, protective, cosmological and martial-epic. Each element of the costume belongs to one or more of these codes.

2. Colour and ornament carry stable meanings: red is linked to youth and life force, dark blue to maidenhood, white to old age; the rhombus symbolises fertility, the zigzag water, the cross the cardinal points. These meanings can be preserved even when forms are simplified.

3. Transferring traditional symbols into modern clothing is most effective when the degree of quotation is graded: everyday elements can be quoted directly, ritual ones should be stylised or deconstructed.

4. The "Gulayım" capsule collection demonstrates that a design matrix linking each look to its creative source, motifs, technique and colour helps keep the semantic balance of a collection and can be used in fashion design education and by small garment enterprises in Karakalpakstan.

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