

THE RAT IN THE CHINESE ZODIAC: SYMBOLISM IN CHINESE, UZBEK, AND ENGLISH CULTURES

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Tuychiyeva Manzura Xojimurodovna

Uzbekistan state world languages university,

Faculty of oriental philology,

Teacher of the department of chinese philology

E- mail: aruznam88@mail.ru

Abstract

This article explores the cultural and symbolic representations of the rat in Chinese, Uzbek, and English cultures, focusing on linguistic expressions, folklore, and mythology. The rat is a complex symbol, embodying both positive and negative traits across different cultures. In Chinese culture, the rat is associated with intelligence and prosperity, while in Uzbek folklore, it is seen as cunning and resourceful. In contrast, English culture predominantly views the rat as a pest and a symbol of disease. This study examines the linguistic expressions and cultural narratives surrounding the rat, highlighting both the differences and similarities in its symbolic representation.

Keywords

Rat, Chinese zodiac, linguoculturology, Chinese culture, Uzbek folklore, British culture, symbolism, comparative analysis, cultural diversity.

Introduction. The rat, as a symbol, occupies a paradoxical space in various cultures. In Chinese culture, it is revered as the first animal in the zodiac and is associated with intelligence and prosperity. However, in daily life, the rat is often viewed negatively due to its association with pests and disease. Similarly, in Uzbek folklore, the rat is portrayed as a cunning and resourceful creature, sometimes embodying both positive and negative traits. In contrast, English culture predominantly views the rat as a symbol of filth, disease, and deceit. This article aims to explore these cultural differences and similarities, focusing on linguistic expressions and symbolic representations.

Research Methodology. This study employs a comparative analysis of linguistic expressions, folklore, and cultural narratives related to the rat in Chinese, Uzbek, and English cultures. The research draws on idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and folk tales to examine how the rat is symbolically represented in each

culture. The analysis is structured around three main themes: linguistic expressions, symbolic similarities, and cultural differences.

Literature Review. *In Chinese culture*, the rat is often depicted as a symbol of intelligence and prosperity. According to Chinese folklore, the rat is considered clever and resourceful, traits that are highly valued. In the Chinese zodiac, people born in the Year of the Rat are believed to be quick-witted, adaptable, and successful in life. The rat's positive image in Chinese culture is reflected in various idioms and expressions, such as "聪明如鼠" (cōngmíng rú shǔ), which means "as clever as a rat."

Cultural Ambivalence Toward Rats:

While the Rat is respected as the first zodiac animal, it is often viewed negatively in daily life due to its association with pests, disease, and destruction. The phrase "老鼠过街，人人喊打" (When a rat crosses the street, everyone shouts, 'Kill it!') reflects this widespread disdain. [1].

Positive Symbolism in Folklore and Mythology: Despite its revered status in the zodiac, the rat is often viewed negatively in daily life due to its association with pests and disease, creating a cultural ambivalence that reflects both respect and disdain: In Mongolian and Tibetan folklore, rats are seen as creatures with a sense of gratitude and morality.

In the ancient kingdom of Khotan, rats were believed to have helped defeat an invading army, leading to their veneration.

In Chinese mythology, the Rat is sometimes associated with prosperity and fertility, as it is a highly reproductive animal [2].

In Uzbek folklore, the rat is often portrayed as a cunning and resourceful trickster, using its intelligence to outwit others [3]. While it can embody negative traits like greed, its cleverness is sometimes celebrated as a form of heroism, especially in tales where it helps solve significant problems.

In folk legends: In Uzbek folk tales, the mouse and the rat are sometimes depicted as enemies, while at other times they symbolize intelligence and triumph. For example, despite their small size, they are often portrayed as heroic animals that help solve significant problems.

In Uzbek folk oral traditions and beliefs, there are various interpretations regarding the Year of the Mouse [4]. Some perceptions and predictions associated with this year include:

1. Fertility and Abundance:

There is a belief among the people that the Year of the Mouse may bring abundant harvests. Although the mouse is small, it is seen as a quick and skillful

animal, symbolizing a prosperous year. According to some beliefs, nature renews itself during the Year of the Mouse, leading to increased fertility of crops.

2. A Year of Change and Activity:

The Year of the Mouse is considered a time of change and new beginnings. It is interpreted as a year when small actions can lead to significant results. People are encouraged to take initiative and strive to be agile and proactive during this year.

3. Fear and Caution:

Some beliefs suggest that the Year of the Mouse may bring certain difficulties and anxieties. Since the mouse itself is delicate and sensitive, it is recommended to act with caution during this year. For example, it is advised to be careful in financial or social matters.

In English culture, the rat is predominantly viewed as a pest or a symbol of disease. This negative perception is rooted in historical events, such as the spread of the bubonic plague, which was transmitted by rats. In literature and popular culture, rats are often depicted as dirty, sneaky, and untrustworthy creatures. Phrases like "to smell a rat" or "to rat someone out" reflect the negative connotations associated with rats in English-speaking societies.

Negative Symbolism in British Folklore:

In British folklore, rats and mice are often associated with disease, filth, and decay. This negative perception stems from historical events, such as the Black Death in the 14th century, which was spread by rats carrying fleas. As a result, rats became symbols of death and destruction in British culture.

Rats as Omens:

In British folklore, rats are sometimes seen as omens of bad luck or impending disaster. For example, the sight of rats fleeing a ship was believed to foretell its sinking. Similarly, rats abandoning a house were thought to signal an upcoming catastrophe, such as a fire or collapse.

Rats in Literature and Popular Culture:

Rats and mice have appeared in British literature and folklore as villains or symbols of fear. For instance, in Robert Browning's poem "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," rats are portrayed as a plague that invades the town, leading to the famous tale of the piper who lures them away. In modern times, rats are often depicted as creepy or malevolent creatures in horror stories and films.

Mice as Symbols of Innocence and Vulnerability:

Unlike rats, mice in British folklore are often seen in a more neutral or even positive light. They are sometimes associated with innocence, vulnerability, and resourcefulness. For example, in Beatrix Potter's tales, mice are portrayed as gentle

and clever creatures, such as Mrs. Tittlemouse, who outsmarts larger animals to protect her home[5] .

Linguistic Expressions and Discussion

The rat symbol is represented differently in Chinese, Uzbek, and English cultures through various linguistic expressions: Chinese Culture: The rat is often associated with intelligence and prosperity. In Chinese, there are several idioms and expressions that highlight the rat's cleverness and resourcefulness:

聪明如鼠 (cōngmíng rú shǔ): "As clever as a rat" – This phrase emphasizes the rat's intelligence and quick thinking.

鼠目寸光 (shǔ mù cùn guāng): "A rat's eyes can only see an inch of light" – This idiom criticizes short-sightedness, using the rat as a metaphor for limited vision.

Uzbek Culture: In Uzbek folklore, the rat is often associated with cunning and resourcefulness. Some common expressions include: "*Arslonning o'ligi – sichqonning tirigi*" "*The death of a lion – the life of a mouse.*" This phrase conveys that even when a person of high status falls from their position, they still remain above ordinary people and retain their dignity.

"*Sichqon sig'mas iniga, g'alvair bog'lar dumiga*" "*A mouse cannot fit into its hole, but it shakes the tail of a pumpkin.*" This proverb is used to describe someone who boasts or shows off beyond their actual capabilities.

"*Sichqon surdi*" "*The mouse has gone out.*" This phrase is used when someone who has just recovered from an illness steps out of their house for the first time to go somewhere. Example in Uzbek: "– Hamzaxonni bugun-erta sichqon surdi qilib, ko'chaga olib chiqamiz, xolajon, xudo xohlasa, – dedi Umar polvon qo'lidagi tugunni Jahonbuvida uzatib." (K. Yashin, Hamza)

"*Sichqonning ini ming tanga*" "*A mouse's hole is worth a thousand coins.*" This phrase is used to describe a situation where finding a place to escape or hide becomes extremely difficult or valuable. Example in Uzbek: "Madrasalar ham jimjit, falakiyot mudarrislari, handasa-yu riyoziyot mullolari uchun sichqonning ini ming tanga bo'lib ketgan edi." (Mirmuhsin, Me'mor) [6].

English Culture: In English, the rat is often associated with negative traits. Some common expressions include: *quiet as a mouse*: If someone is quiet as a mouse, they are very quiet or silent.

"During the day Mom was quiet as a mouse. She hardly said or did anything. We were quiet as mice, hiding in there".

"*To smell a rat*": This phrase means to sense that something is wrong or suspicious, reflecting the rat's association with deceit and danger. For example,

"When I didn't hear any more from my prospective employer, I began to smell a rat".

"To rat someone out": This expression means to betray someone by revealing their secrets, further emphasizing the rat's negative connotations in English culture. [7].

Analysis and Results

These linguistic expressions not only highlight the rat's symbolic traits but also reflect broader cultural attitudes. For example, Chinese idioms emphasize intelligence and resourcefulness, while English phrases often underscore deceit and betrayal, reflecting the rat's dual role as both a clever creature and a harbinger of misfortune.

Linguistic Differences

The linguistic expressions surrounding the rat vary significantly across cultures. Chinese idioms emphasize the rat's intelligence and resourcefulness, while Uzbek proverbs highlight its cunning and adaptability. In contrast, English expressions predominantly focus on the rat's negative traits, associating it with deceit, betrayal, and disease.

Symbolic Similarities

Despite the cultural differences, there are some symbolic similarities in the representation of the rat. Across all three cultures, the rat is associated with resourcefulness and adaptability. In Chinese and Uzbek cultures, the rat is often seen as a clever and quick-witted creature, while in English culture, its resourcefulness is portrayed in a more negative light, as a symbol of cunning and deceit.

Cultural Differences

The cultural differences in the representation of the rat are rooted in historical and societal contexts. In Chinese culture, the rat's positive symbolism is tied to its role in the zodiac and folklore, while its negative reputation stems from its association with pests and disease. In Uzbek folklore, the rat's dual role as both a trickster and a hero reflects the complexity of its symbolic representation. In English culture, the rat's negative symbolism is deeply rooted in historical events such as the Black Death, which shaped its perception as a harbinger of disease and death.

Conclusion. The rat is a complex and multifaceted symbol, embodying both positive and negative traits across different cultures. While Chinese and Uzbek cultures emphasize the rat's intelligence, resourcefulness, and cunning, English culture predominantly views the rat as a symbol of disease and deceit. These differences in symbolic representation reflect broader cultural values and historical

contexts. By examining the linguistic expressions and cultural narratives surrounding the rat, this study highlights the rich and varied ways in which the rat is perceived and represented across cultures.

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