

**NATIONAL RITES AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION: HISTORICAL  
EVOLUTION AND CONTEMPORARY FUNCTIONS**

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| ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | KEYWORDS                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| The article examines national rites as an integral social institution and traces how their functions have changed from antiquity and the Middle Ages through the modern era to post-industrial society. Drawing on socio-philosophical analysis and the historical-comparative method, the author shows that national rites, once confined to securing communal unity and regulating everyday conduct, have become a systemic institution that shapes economic, political, social and cultural processes. The economic dimension is revealed through employment, consumer demand, the support of handicrafts and the circulation of financial resources; the political dimension through the legitimization of power, the formation of political identity and historical memory; the social dimension through integration, trust and socialisation; and the cultural dimension through the preservation of heritage, national identity and language under globalisation. | National rites, social institution, globalisation, legitimacy, political identity, historical memory, social integration, socialisation, intangible cultural heritage, national identity. |

**Introduction**

At every stage of historical development, rites have functioned as a coherent social institution performing social, cultural and spiritual tasks. In the earliest societies, where people depended heavily on the forces of nature, social relations were weakly differentiated and scientific knowledge was limited, rites served as a mechanism that sustained the life and activity of the community. Before state institutions and formal law took shape, conduct was regulated chiefly through customs, traditions and ritual observance.

Contemporary social science has long recognised this regulatory capacity. E. Durkheim regarded collective ritual as the moment in which a society becomes conscious of itself and renews the sentiments on which its unity rests [1]. A. van Gennep, in turn, demonstrated that rites accompany every transition in an individual's life and convert biological or personal events into socially recognised changes of status [2]. Yet the classical theories were formulated with traditional societies in view. The present day raises a different question: what becomes of national rites in an urbanised, digitised and globalised world, and do they retain institutional weight once the conditions that produced them have disappeared?

The purpose of this article is to substantiate the thesis that national rites have not lost their significance in modern conditions but, on the contrary, have been elevated to the level of a systemic institution capable of influencing economic, political, social and cultural processes. To achieve this purpose, the study sets out to trace the historical evolution of ritual functions and to identify the principal directions in which national rites act upon contemporary social life.

## Literature Review

The scholarly treatment of rites as a social phenomenon has developed along several lines. The sociological tradition founded by E. Durkheim interprets ritual as a source of social cohesion and collective effervescence that periodically reaffirms the moral community [1]. A. van Gennep's typology of rites of passage, with its three phases of separation, transition and incorporation, remains the basic framework for analysing life-cycle ceremonies such as birth, marriage and funeral rites [2]. V. Turner extended this approach by introducing the concepts of liminality and *communitas*, showing that ritual generates a temporary sphere of equality and solidarity among participants regardless of their everyday status [3].

The political dimension of ritual was systematically explored by the American political anthropologist D. Kertzer, who argued in his work "Ritual, Politics, and Power" that ritual is indispensable to modern states as a means of legitimising authority, constructing political loyalty and shaping mass consciousness [4]. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, examining national holidays, anniversaries and state ceremonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showed that many of them were consciously created or reshaped to underpin the nation-state and its claim to historical continuity [5].

At the international normative level, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) explicitly includes social practices, rituals and festive events among the domains of intangible heritage and obliges states to ensure their viability [6]. In Uzbek scholarship, U. Hosil (Qoraboyev) has provided a detailed historical and ethnographic description of Uzbek customs and family ceremonies [7], while U. Raimjanova has analysed the formation of national family values under the conditions of globalisation [8].

These studies illuminate separate aspects of ritual life. What remains insufficiently developed is a holistic socio-philosophical account that treats national rites as one institution and examines simultaneously their economic, political, social and cultural effects in contemporary society. The present article seeks to address this gap.

## Methodology

The study is grounded in the institutional approach, according to which a social institution is understood as a historically formed, relatively stable set of norms, roles and practices that satisfies fundamental needs of society. Within this framework, national rites were examined as an institution whose functions change in response to the transformation of the social environment.

Three groups of methods were employed. The historical-comparative method made it possible to distinguish four stages in the evolution of ritual functions, namely antiquity, the Middle Ages, the modern era and post-industrial society, and to compare the dominant role of rites at each stage. The method of socio-philosophical analysis was used to interpret the content and meaning of ritual practices and their relationship to values, identity and power. Comparative case analysis drew on the state ceremonies of the United States, France, India and Uzbekistan in order to demonstrate the political

functions of national rites across different cultural contexts. Finally, structural-functional analysis was applied to group the contemporary effects of national rites into four spheres of social life.

## Analysis and Results

The historical analysis shows a consistent expansion of ritual functions. In antiquity, rites served mainly to organise collective life, to regulate relations with natural forces and to secure communal solidarity. In the Middle Ages, the development of statehood, the spread of religious teachings, the rise of urban culture and the growing complexity of social relations turned national rites into an institution of considerable weight. Above all, rites became fused with religious values and norms, which deepened their content and made them a means of sustaining the spiritual unity of society. A person's place, status and obligations came to be expressed largely through ceremony: the marriage rite marked the founding of a new family, while professional and communal rites signified the acquisition of a particular social standing.

In the modern era, national rites acquired new tasks. They contributed to the formation of nation-states by expressing the historical memory and values of the people and thereby strengthening civic solidarity. Festivals and celebrations stimulated local crafts, services and trade. During the period of accelerating urbanisation, when populations moved to cities and social ties grew more diffuse, rites helped to preserve kinship and neighbourly bonds. From the second half of the twentieth century, the institutional significance of national rites increased further: in post-industrial society they became a mechanism with substantial economic, political, social and cultural consequences. The results of the analysis may accordingly be summarised in four directions.

**First,** National rites act as an institution that shapes contemporary economic processes. In traditional societies their economic side was confined largely to domestic and neighbourhood exchange; today it forms a complex process involving numerous actors. Modern ceremonies are organised with the participation of managers, cooks, confectioners, decorators, singers, musicians, photographers, videographers, designers and drivers, which makes rites a stable source of demand for a wide range of services. In economic theory this phenomenon is described as a multiplier effect, whereby demand arising in one sector generates activity in others. Since the clothing, jewellery and gifts required by weddings and anniversaries are largely handmade, the growth in orders sustains traditional crafts such as embroidery, jewellery making, wood carving, pottery, coppersmithing and ganch carving. The funds spent on ceremonies do not remain idle: they flow to dozens of firms and entrepreneurs and are subsequently reinvested in new jobs and projects, so that rites accelerate the circulation of financial resources. At the global level, market estimates place the wedding services industry alone at more than 650 billion US dollars in 2024, with forecasts of growth to about 1.29 trillion dollars by 2032, which indicates that ritual-related activity has become a distinct segment of the world economy.

**Second,** National rites act as an institution that influences contemporary political processes. Their political significance lies in strengthening the ties between state and society, promoting the ideas of national statehood and shaping the political consciousness of citizens. Many states demonstrate their sovereignty precisely through national holidays and official ceremonies. In the United States, Independence Day on 4 July commemorates the Declaration of Independence of 1776, and the official ceremonies held on that date articulate the core political values of American statehood. In France, Bastille Day on 14 July symbolises the Republic and popular sovereignty. In Uzbekistan, 1 September, Independence Day, is celebrated as a principal symbol of statehood and national sovereignty, and for

several decades the official events, state award ceremonies and festivities of that day have glorified the idea of independent statehood. As D. Kertzer observes, such rituals secure the legitimacy of existing authority and act upon mass consciousness [4]: any state requires not only legal and administrative mechanisms but also public recognition, and through ceremony it presents itself as the lawful successor of the nation's historical development. National holidays, commemorations and rites connected with state symbols also serve as instruments of political identification, that is, of a person's awareness of belonging to a political community, state or nation. In India, Independence Day on 15 August and Republic Day on 26 January, with its military parade and official ceremonies glorifying the Constitution and state institutions, foster loyalty to the state among millions of citizens. Commemorations of statesmen, enlighteners and national heroes also form historical memory. Finally, they act as a tool of political modernisation: in Uzbekistan, the goals and main directions of the reforms carried out under the "Uzbekistan-2030" strategy are communicated to the public through national holidays, solemn events and official addresses.

**Third,** National rites act as an institution that shapes contemporary social processes. Intensive urbanisation and migration, together with rising social mobility, weaken the ties between people. Under these conditions, holidays, festivities, family ceremonies and commemorations bring together people of different ages, occupations, social status and life experience in one place and around shared purposes, thereby preserving long-cherished values of kinship, neighbourliness and fraternity and serving as a means of social integration. The organisation of a ceremony requires joint action, cooperation and a division of tasks: participants receive guests, coordinate programmes and handle practical arrangements, and in doing so they are obliged to rely on one another's responsibility and competence. This experience of cooperation, which recalls the state of *communitas* described by V. Turner [3], strengthens mutual trust. Rites are also a channel of socialisation through which young people learn the norms and rules of conduct of their society. Their social importance becomes especially evident against the background of growing individualisation and communicative isolation. Loneliness has turned into a recognised social problem in many developed countries; Great Britain appointed a minister responsible for loneliness in 2018, and Japan established a similar post in 2021. In such circumstances national rites remain one of the few factors that draw people out of isolation and maintain regular interpersonal communication.

**Fourth,** National rites act as an institution that shapes contemporary cultural processes. Globalisation, which gathered pace from the last quarter of the twentieth century, has had a twofold effect on national cultures. It has broadened cultural contacts and accelerated exchange, yet under the influence of Western mass culture it has also led to unification of cultures and declining interest in national language, customs and traditions. In this context the cultural role of national rites becomes strategic. They preserve the world view, customs and accumulated life experience of peoples, which is why the 2003 UNESCO Convention singles out social practices, rituals and festive events as a domain of intangible cultural heritage [6]. Through participation in rites, people come to know their nation's past and, by means of the customs and symbols enacted, recognise themselves as members of a particular nation, which reinforces national identity. Rites also transmit values from generation to generation: the Uzbek people have long esteemed hospitality, tolerance, mutual respect, modesty (*andisha*), reverence for elders, kindness to the young and harmony [7; 8]. The ceremonial reception of guests is a practical expression of hospitality, and the observance of etiquette among people of different status manifests

andisha. The folklore, blessings and proverbs used in ceremonies also help preserve the national language.

## Discussion

The results confirm and at the same time extend the classical theories of ritual. Durkheim's thesis on the integrative power of collective ceremony [1] retains its explanatory force, but in contemporary conditions integration is no longer the only, or even the dominant, function of rites. The data presented above show that national rites have become embedded in market relations, in the communicative strategies of the state and in the cultural policy of heritage protection. In this respect the findings agree with D. Kertzer's conclusion that ritual is not a residue of traditional society but a constitutive element of modern political life [4], and with the observation of E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger that national ceremonies are continually reshaped to serve present-day purposes [5].

At the same time, the analysis points to an internal tension within the institution. The growth of the ritual economy creates jobs and supports crafts, yet it also carries the risk of commercialisation, excessive expenditure and the displacement of spiritual meaning by display. The political use of ceremonies strengthens civic identity, but it requires that rites remain grounded in genuine historical memory rather than in formal routine. Globalisation enriches rites with new forms while threatening their national distinctiveness. These contradictions suggest that the modernisation of national rites should not amount to a rejection of their traditional content; rather, it ought to consist in adapting that content to new conditions, an approach consistent with the findings of U. Raimjanova on the evolution of family values [8]. For Uzbekistan, where ceremonial life remains exceptionally rich, this conclusion has practical relevance for state cultural policy, the work of mahalla institutions and educational programmes aimed at young people.

## Conclusion

The study allows several conclusions to be drawn. National rites have been significant at every stage of historical development. In antiquity and the Middle Ages they ensured communal unity, preserved religious and moral values and regulated social relations. In the modern era they became a factor in the formation of nation-states, the growth of industry and trade and the mitigation of the social consequences of urbanisation. The tendencies that emerged from the second half of the twentieth century not only changed the nature of national rites but also gave their social significance a new character. Renewed and modernised under these tendencies, national rites have become a systemic institution that exerts a powerful influence on economic, political, social and cultural processes.

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