

THE ARCHETYPE OF FESTIVAL CULTURE: SYMBOLISM IN NAWRUZ AND KOREAN FESTIVITIES

SHIN GYU-SEOB, LEE JONG-OH

ABSTRACT

Although Persia played a major role as an archetypal culture, traditional scholarship holds that it degenerated into a “lost civilization,” and only its intermediary role between Eastern and Western civilizations has been recognized. Even so, the customs and ritual ceremonies of Persia, particularly as seen in the festival of Nawruz (the New Year Festival), have the oldest cultural roots in the world, and their influence is still prevalent globally. There is a need to rediscover Persian civilization and culture, which has been pushed to the margins, to reinterpret its symbols, and to restore its position as an archetype. This paper utilizes the festival of Nawruz as a primary example of the lasting influence of Persian culture, as seen in the Iranian Festival of Fire, symbolism in certain numbers and rituals, and the correlation of several ritual images from ancient Persia to their more contemporary counterparts in Korea and other Asian regions.

Keywords: Persian culture, Nawruz festival, Korea, East Asian History, Symbolism of the Numbers, Significance of the Two Fishes, Festival of Fire

I. INTRODUCTION

Festivities and religion have an inseparable relationship, with many religious elements being reflected in festivities. The Iranian Nawruz festival (*naw* means “new” and *ruz* means “day”) began with the ancient Sumerians¹ and flourished with Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia. Zoroastrianism, the official religion of the Achaemenid dynasty, had a great impact on Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Nawruz consists of three elements: *Sofreye-Haft Sin* (the seven *s*’s table setting of the new year), *Chaharshanbe Suri* (the red Wednesday bonfire festival), and *Sizdah Bedar* (the thirteenth day in outdoors). This article deals with some of the specific symbols and traditions from these three elements, such as the symbolism behind the numbers seven and thirteen—which are regarded as numbers of fortune and misfortune, respectively, a belief that spread into Europe through Greece and persists to this day² – the background of the “Two Fishes

¹ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 217.

² Gholamreza Tabatabayi Mozd (1995), p. 654.

Design,” and the Festivity of Fire. These elements are crucial to understanding the origin and significance of Nawruz. The purpose of this paper is to utilize the study of Nawruz to explore the deep academic distortion of the Humanities and culture as a whole. The neglect of a search for an academic archetype, or the roots of the study process, is tantamount to ignoring this distortion.

Nawruz is the largest festival in Iran, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. It marks the summation of the culture and tradition of these regions. This paper analyzes the cultural transmission process surrounding Nawruz, particularly with respect to its influence on the festivities of Korea. Ignorance of cultural archetypes leads to misconceptions and distortions, and this paper focuses on revealing such misconceptions in a careful manner. For instance, Zoroaster is remembered as the first spiritual leader in human society. Zoroaster’s thought had a great influence on that of Plato in ancient Greece and on Lao-tzu’s thought in ancient China. “Zoroaster is the vaunt-courier of Plato and the appearance of Plato is considered the resurrection of Zoroaster. Plato is the figure of reformation of Zoroastrianism and or even rescuer of Mazdaism.”³ “Religion and philosophy in ancient China can be explained by reference to Taoism. Explaining China without Taoism cannot be imagined.”⁴ I will deal with this topic in detail in the section on the symbolism of the number seven. The neglect of this kind of research is connected to a decline in the Humanities, including Eastern-Western academic genealogy.

II. BACKGROUND

The Persian civilization that established the Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilizations played the role of archetype for the culture and customs that these regions came to practice as their own,⁵ but according to Western logic, Persia degenerated into a “lost civilization,” and its lasting influence has been neglected by scholars and historians ever since. Western discourse has dominated much of Asia for centuries, particularly in modern times, with the political control the West has exerted over the East. Persian civilization and culture have been marginalized. If a proper study of the many extant cultural and religious traditions is to be conducted, Persian history will need to be reinterpreted according to the archetypal role it played in the development of adjacent regions and beyond. The study of cultural archetypes is connected to the fundamental principles of study, however, and there are large difficulties with regard to the research procedure as a consequence. If the genealogy of such a transmission process is not established, certain elements of history and the Humanities cannot be properly understood.

Festivities reflect an aggregation of many elements of a culture. Nawruz is the largest festival of the ancient Iranians and in many ways represents the summation of the Iranian tradition. Festivities and religion have an inseparable relationship. The seasonal festivities, including Sadeh (the ancient Persian festival in mid-winter) and Mehregan (the ancient Persian festival of autumn), originated in

³ Mase Henry et al. (2003), p. 108.

⁴ Omid Ataii (2004), p. 384.

⁵ Gyu Seob Shin (2001), p. 151.

Zoroastrianism, and traditional Asian festivities in particular are closely related to religion. Most of the world's religions have their origins in the East, and when Eastern and Western festivities of today are compared, this is even more apparent. Until now, the Eastern roots of civilization have not been widely recognized, but if we look at Persian documents, discussion on this issue dates back to the middle of the twentieth century.⁶

The major festivities represented as originating from Christian culture and Greek mythology center around Lent, Easter, and Christmas. The festivities surrounding these holidays are closely intertwined with religious beliefs and symbols, but they embrace materialistic and hedonic elements as well. The roots of Western studies lie in Greece, and the origins of Western civilization are widely considered to be Hellenism and Hebraism. Eastern and Western civilizations have been separately researched without deviating from their respective boundaries, and there are not many studies in existence about the correlation between the ancient East and West. Regarding ancient Persian civilization, only its intermediary role between East and West has been emphasized, and its influence on other civilizations has either been neglected or concealed. It is the task of a researcher to discover concealed truth, and thus this paper sets out to find the archetype of Eastern and Western festivities. What relationship can we discern between Eastern and Western festivities, and what accounts for the similarities between them?

In order to answer these questions, we need to go all the way back to Persia's Achaemenid dynasty, the world's first empire. The Achaemenid dynasty was destroyed by Alexander, but the ancient culture and customs of Persia were transmitted to the West. We need to pay close attention to the Persian religious system, which has persisted from ancient times. Persian language and culture have spread extensively throughout Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Central Asia. The religious system of ancient Persia is connected to Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Sufism, Manichaeism, and Mazdaism. The fact that Mithraism was an ancient Persian religion that started in the central Iranian city of Kerman in the fifteenth century BC is not well known. This religion has many parallels in modern Christianity. As widely known in the West, Persia's virgin Goddess Anahita resembles Jesus' mother, Mary; Jesus resembles Mithra; and the celebrated birth date of Jesus, December 25, is identical to the birth date of Mithra.⁷ Furthermore, ancient Persian mythology spread to Greece and helped shape early Greek mythology.

If the transmission and influence of Eastern traditions on Western religions are not unearthed, the connections between both genealogies will be broken, and the Eastern and Western religions will continue to be researched within their respective academic boundaries, leading to the perpetuation of a mistaken view. Furthermore, the difference between Eastern and Western civilizations will continue to be magnified, which hinders the peaceful coexistence of civilizations. So far, even in the East, research regarding the origins and transmission of traditional festivities has hardly been conducted.

⁶ Hashem Razi (1964), p. 26.

⁷ Gyu Seob Shin (2014b), p. 95.

III. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PERSIAN AND EAST ASIAN HISTORY

The Yin-Yang and Five Element Theories of Taoism were influenced by the Amesha Sepand of Zoroastrianism. The Yin-Yang and Five Elements have been prevalent in Korean and Chinese thought for over two thousand years. Yin-Yang is connected with the dualism of Persia, and the Five Elements are tied to Amesha Sepand. Chinese thought and philosophy cannot be explained without Taoism. The most important document in Taoism, the I-Ching, was obtained from the old and mysterious knowledge known as *Ramal* in Persia.”⁸

The Iranian people exerted significant influence on the political and cultural aspects of China’s Tang dynasty,⁹ so when Silla used the dynasty’s power to unify the three kingdoms of Korea, Chinese culture spread and Chinese customs were established as Korean customs. This provided the opportunity for Persian culture, which was popular in China, to flow into the Silla dynasty. Because we traditionally search China for the origins of Korean culture, we must also raise the question: whence did Chinese culture originate? The correlation between Chinese and Persian civilizations, including the Korean peninsula, is well represented in the three following examples:

The fact that the ancient Korean peninsula adopted several characteristics of Persia’s ancient civilization, culture, and arts is already partially recognized, but these facts are accounted for in greater detail in *Baztabe Tamadonhaye Parthia-Sassanid bar Se Padshahi dar Shabe Jajireye Kore* [The discovery of Persian (Parthian and Sassanid) cultural elements in the heritage of “the Three Kingdoms” of Korea]. Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab recounts the division of ancient Persia into the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras and discusses the different levels of political, cultural, and trade-related exchange that took place between Persia and East and West Asia. The Achaemenid dynasty ranged as far as western China. Thus, Persia had a significant influence on the societies of Korea, China, and Far East Asian countries from religious, conventional, and cultural perspectives. The Parthian and Sassanid civilizations and cultures also had an impact on ancient Korea through the Persianized Central Asia region.

China (*Chin* in Persian) is referred to as “*Sayini*” in the Avesta (the ancient Zoroastrian scriptures) and appears as one of the five Aryan regions. Sayini gradually evolved into “*Chin*” (middle Persian; sometimes rendered “*Sin*”) and began to be referred to as the eastern province of greater Iran. *Sayini* (or *Sin*) was also one of the names of the sun. As the world’s easternmost region, Chin was considered the origin of the sun.¹⁰

According to *Chinese National Geography*, Hu Barbarians ruled the Tang dynasty. From the aspect of terminology, “Hu” was transformed into “Hui.” According to Chinese scholar Tan Hui Ju, in the present, “Hui” refers to Muslims, but in ancient China, “Huihui” had the meaning of the Persian language. “From the view of peoples, different opinions exist about the ethnicity of the Hu, including

⁸ Omid Ataii (2004), pp. 383, 392.

⁹ Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab (2004), pp. 99-103.

¹⁰ Omid Ataii, (2004), p. 379.

that of the Tang dynasty in China, where this term meant imported commodities from abroad and the peoples of various ethnic groups that usually included white people and Westerners. However, during the Middle Ages, the term Hu was commonly applied to Iranians.”¹¹ “In the Middle Ages, the term Hu was used only in relation to Iranians.”¹² “In Chang An, the capital of the Tang dynasty, the term Hu was used in relation to Iranians from the Middle East and West Asia.”¹³ During the Mongolian interference period around the end of the Goryeo dynasty, Goryeo and Ilkanid (1256-1353, a Mongolian empire within Persia) were both influenced by the Yuan Empire. After Persia collapsed in AD 642, following the Arab invasion, Persians flowed into China; the historical relationship between the two countries during this period is recounted in the following passage:

*After the collapse of Persia, many Persians made their home in Jang An, which was the capital of the Tang dynasty at the time, and among the ethnic minorities in China there were a significant number of Iranians who were from Central Asia and Persia. Most of the Persians who resided within the capital, Jang An, were high officials of the Sassanid court and members of the upper class who had been the main figures of ancient Persia. Sassanid Persians are reported to have been the biggest influence on the Tang dynasty's imperial family, high officials, and upper class.*¹⁴

IV. THE ORIGINES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF NAWRUZ

1. Origins

The festivals of Middle Eastern Islamic countries might be expected to be related to Islam alone, but the Persian festival, which does not belong to the Arab region, goes back to the Sumerians, who established humankind's first civilization 7,000 years ago. According to researcher on ancient Iranian festivals Hashem Razi, “The Sumerian people were natives of the Iranian plateaus, and the Sumerians migrated to Mesopotamia to develop a glorious civilization. It is clear that Iran had been the origin and source of the oldest center of civilization and publication.”¹⁵ The Sumerians are regarded as having created the Nawruz new-year festival, but it was after the emergence of Zoroastrianism that Nawruz was fully established as a ritual ceremony. The Nawruz festival could boast of thousands of years' worth of history before Islam even entered Iran and Central Asia, and the Iranian people cherish the Nawruz festival, which has existed for thousands of years longer than the Islamic festivals, including the Eid-ul-Adha (pilgrimage religious festival) and the Eid-ul-Fetr (fasting religious festival).

“The oldest sign in the New Year festival of West Asia is related to the first Ur dynasty, and the festival marks the holy marriage between the Goddess of water and God of belief.”¹⁶ The term “Nawruz” first emerged in Persian documents with the Sassanid dynasty in the third century. It was also designated a holiday in the

¹¹ Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab (2005), p. 69, & Gyu Seob Shin (2014), p. 123.

¹² Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab (2004), p. 82.

¹³ Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab (2004), p. 83.

¹⁴ Sotudeh-Nejad Shahab (2004), p. 102.

¹⁵ Hashem Razi (1964), 25-26; (2004b), pp. 40-41.

¹⁶ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 217.

Parthian dynasty (247 BC–224 AD). During the Sassanid dynasty, Nawruz was celebrated as the most important day of the year. The kings of twenty odd different countries who were under Persia's rule at the time celebrated Nawruz by presenting an offering to the Persian king, Shahanshah. This act is depicted in engravings on the walls of the Apadana Court and the Hall of a Hundred Columns in Persepolis (showcase of Zoroastrianism), which appears to have been built for the specific purpose of celebrating Nawruz, but this is not mentioned in the epitaph of the dynasty. The great poet of medieval Persia Ferdowsi (940-1020 AD) wrote in his *Shahnameh* that Nawruz dates back to the era of the Persian king Jamshid in the mythological era, who is described as the most revered and wise king in Persian mythology.

2. Significance

Upon the arrival of the spring equinox (March 21), when day and night are of equal length, hundreds of millions of people greet the new year all over Iran, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Afghanistan, and Central Asia. In addition, the festival is celebrated in the northern part of Pakistan and among the Iranians who migrated to Zanzibar from Shiraz. The festival marks the end of the cold winter and the arrival of spring. Spring signifies goodness, and winter signifies evil, reflecting Persian dualism. The motif of good triumphing over evil is widespread in Asian culture.

Nawruz is celebrated on the first day of Farvardin, the first month of the Persian calendar. Previously, because of leap years, the date of Nawruz shifted one month every 120 years. In the late Sassanid dynasty, Nawruz was celebrated in summer. In 1078, King Malekshah ordered the philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and poet Omar Khayyam (1048-1131 AD) to reform the calendar, and the date of Nawruz was set to the first day of spring, or the beginning of the zodiac calendar.¹⁷

Nawruz is the most treasured holiday and the largest cultural festival in Iran and Central Asia. People clean their homes inside and out and decorate them. Before Nawruz arrives, people bathe and change into new clothes. They wait for the exact moment of the spring equinox to be announced on radio or television. Family members stay at home until the exact moment comes, and when it does, they kiss the hands of the family elders as a sign of respect. They embrace one another and traditionally give coins or money. Cookies are served in the hope that the year will be as sweet as the cookies. Many people visit their homeland hometown or go traveling during Nawruz; they may also help the poor or pray for peace. Small mirrors are exchanged between people, rose water is sprayed into the air, and *esfand* (a common weed in the Middle East) is burned to ward off the evil eye. Traditionally, on the eve of the new year, celebrants grill fresh fish and vegetables and eat specially prepared rice called *polo* (*pilaw* in ancient Persian, *plov* in Central Asia, and *pilaf* in the West). After the rice and vegetables are prepared separately, they are stir-fried together in oil, and the resulting dish is called *sabzi polo mahi* (herbed rice with fish). Other traditional new-year foods

¹⁷ Hashem Razi (2004), p. 24.

include *reshte polo* (rice cooked with noodles) and *dolmehbarg*, which is cooked by wrapping grape leaves around cooked vegetables and meat and cooking the wrap again, similar to the Korean *kimbab*. Koreans and Iranians alike bring this type of food on short journeys.¹⁸

Before Nawruz begins, people dressed as *Haji Firuz* walk down the streets with their faces, necks, and hands painted black, wearing traditional red garb and conical hats, singing and playing tambourines.¹⁹ *Haji Firuz* represents a martyred god connected to the slaying of Siyavash. The blackened face reflects the rebirth and secondary advent of Siyavash from the afterlife. The red clothing represents Siyavash's blood and the resurrection of the martyred god. The characteristic happiness of the *Haji Firuz* marks the celebration of rebirth and is intended to bestow blessings and growth on festival participants.²⁰ According to folklorist Mehrdad Bahar, *Haji Firuz* is the traditional herald of Nawruz, which is connected to the epic of Siyavash, derived from the Sumerian deity Dumuzi.

Preparations for Nawruz begin in the last month of the Persian calendar, *Espan* (February 20–March 20). In addition to cleaning and purchasing new clothing, people buy or plant flowers such as hyacinths and tulips. Iranians and Central Asians eat a kind of flour bread called *nan* dipped in a grain syrup called *samanu*. *Samanu* is made by grinding sprouted grain flour and then cooking it with mixed flour and malt. The traditional Korean pumpkin porridge and grain syrup resembles this dish. *Samanu* is one of the seven foods that start with the letter *s* that are served on the Iranian new-year table. The Iranian table setting, which has continued for thousands of years, has a philosophical significance that will be elaborated in a later section.

In the middle of the seventh century, before Islam spread into the Persian region, wine also appeared on the new-year table. At the commencement of the Islamic era, however, alcohol was prohibited and replaced with vinegar. From the perspective of origins, Iran's new-year table contains ancestral rituals that are not greatly different from Korean ancestral rites, and the seven foods served on the new-year tablecloth (*sofre* in Persian) can be regarded as a custom to allow the ancestors to eat.²¹ The origins of ancestor worship that can be observed in Korea's seasonal customs can also be found in China and Persia. If we look closely, we can see that some of *Haft Sin*'s items are related to the worship on the holy trees.

Apart from *Haft Sin*, foods that appear on the new-year table include fish and eggs. Fish symbolize persistently moving life, and eggs symbolize fecundity. Oranges symbolize the Earth floating in the universe, while the mirror and lit candle symbolize a clean and bright heart pursued by truth-seekers. Even today, Zoroastrians place a candle in front of the mirror in order to reflect even more light. "Keeping candles lit was a measure to drive away demons from the homes, villages, and cities, and reading religious books or the Koran after the Islamic era

¹⁸ Gyu Seob Shin (2010), p. 102.

¹⁹ Hashem Razi (2004), p. 214.

²⁰ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 219.

²¹ Hashem Razi (2004), p. 49.

was believed to drive away spirits.”²² The mirror is an important feature in Zoroastrian arts and architecture and is widely mentioned in Persian literature. Even today, Iranian stores follow the custom by decorating their shops with mirrors. When March approaches, various Iranian shops are crowded with people trying to buy fish. Fish patterns also appear on carpets and ceramics made by Iranians. Before the new year approaches, fish paintings can be observed in galleries and exhibitions, and various artistic works have the Two Fishes Design engraved on them.

V. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NUMBER SEVEN

For the new year’s meal, Iranians select seven food items whose names begin with the letter *s*, such as *sib* (apple), *sir* (garlic), *serke* (vinegar), *somagh* (spices), *samanu* (grain syrup), *sanjad* (a tree fruit that is shaped like a jujube), *siahdane* (black seed), *sabze* (wheat, barley, or lentil sprouts growing in a dish), *sepestan* (a sort of plum blossom), and *sonbol* (hyacinthus). Along with the seven food items, the following are also included on the new year’s table: colored eggs, a mirror, a lit candle, oranges, daffodils, rose water, and goldfish. The seven foods that start with the letter *s* are called *Haft Sin* (*Haft* means “seven,” and *Sin* is the letter *s* in the Persian language).²³

The Iranian new year is traditionally linked to the Sumerians, who inhabited the Iranian plateaus before the Aryan people moved into Iran 3,000 years ago. Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1879-1956, a famous linguist and author of a Persian dictionary) records that, “The earliest people to have been interested in the number seven were the Sumerians.”²⁴ Taking this into consideration, some of the rituals might be seen as having been started by Sumer natives, but choosing foods that begin with the letter *s* is related to an aspect of Zoroastrianism. The letter *s* is significant in Zoroastrianism because it is the first letter in the word *Sepand* (holy) in the phrase *Amesha Sepand*, which means “immortal sacredness.” The supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda, was known as “an eternal sacredness” that protected the people along with six angels, and these seven figures account for the veneration of the number seven.²⁵ The number seven was also connected to the seven known planets, and therefore some believe that the idea of the *Haft Sin* existed even before Zoroastrianism was established.

Zoroastrianism also bestows a symbolic significance upon the number three (as seen, for instance, in the three principles of Zoroastrianism: good words, good thoughts, and good deeds). The symbolism of the numbers seven and three was transferred to China and appears in the veneration of dates such as the third day of the third lunar month and the seventh day of the seventh month. “The five elements based on Persian beliefs, named Ordibehesht, Khordad, Espand, Shahrivar, and Amordad, become, for the Chinese, Fire, Water, Land (Earth), Gold, and Wood. From time immemorial, there have been civilized relations between Iranians and

²² Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 212.

²³ Young Yeon Kim (1997), p. 321.

²⁴ Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1998), pp. 23 and 487.

²⁵ Gholamreza Tabatabayi Mozd (1995), p. 654.

Chinese, and in ancient times the flow of Iranian thoughts reached the Chinese. The Chinese had obtained the idea of Five Elements from the Iranians.” “A Sufi believes that the number (3-5-7-9) is considered as the number of his own peculiarity in the ritual implements (Barsam or Barsom) of the Srosh (Yasht).”²⁶The number of Barsam (sacred bundle of twigs) required differs in Zoroastrian religious practices. In Korea events like the women’s spring play for pan-fried sweet rice cake with flower petals of March 3, Korean wrestling on May 5, etc., are similar to Iranian and Central Asian culture. The love poem (Ghazal in Persian) of Iran and Central Asia fails to exceed twelve lines in length to the extent possible and consists of five, seven, or nine.

Some of the most essential concepts of Zoroastrianism include hell, heaven, resurrection, the emergence of a messiah, and a final judgment. These concepts appear in monotheistic religions as well, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mahayana Buddhism was also influenced by Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster (the founder of Zoroastrianism; Zartosht in modern Persian, Zarathustra in ancient Persian), introduced various festivals and rituals to worship the supreme deity, Ahura Mazda.

VI. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TWO FISHES

In a contemporary new year’s tradition, Iranians send each other e-cards featuring pictures of fish. This tradition can be traced all the way back to the celebration of the Iranian and Central Asian new year, which commences at the spring equinox and the sign of Pisces, which is the final sign of the zodiac. The influence of Zoroastrianism is reflected in Buddhism through the Two Fishes Design as well: fish are the animals depicted as protecting Buddha. The Iranian new year is often referred to as a festival of movement, activity, effort, and life. The fish also symbolize the search for meaning within movement. Life is symbolized by the perpetual movement of the fish. In Korea, the Two Fishes Design is used as evidence that Buddhism had entered the southern region of Korea. “Indian-styled Buddhist decoration has remained on the front gate and in the inscription of the Suro emperor’s tomb in Kimhae. The front gate of the tomb has the Two Fishes Design inscribed on it.”²⁷ The Two Fishes Design can also be seen in the Iranian new-year table setting, which includes a bowl with two live fishes, reflecting the original dualism of Persian theology.

Before becoming the Aryan new year, Nawruz was the new year of the Sumerians, who entered Mesopotamia through the Persian Gulf, Iranian plateaus, and Khuzestan, in southern Persia around 4,000 BC. In this way, many seasonal customs were transferred from the Iranian plateaus into Mesopotamia.²⁸ The Sumerians carried with them rituals and customs, such as venerating fish: “‘fish of God’—the symbol of clearing sin—and this pattern (the Two Fishes Design) were discovered in ancient Mesopotamia.”²⁹

²⁶ Omid Ataii (2004), p. 384.

²⁷ Su II Jeong (2001), p. 520.

²⁸ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 217.

²⁹ Su II Jeong (2001), p. 520.

The design also emerges in the paintings of ancient Persia's Elam kingdom. Besides the Two Fishes Design, the Two Animals Design (consisting of winged animals—horses, oxen, or lions—facing each other) originated in the Achaemenid era, and the Two Birds Design (which depicts two standing birds) can be traced to the Sassanid era (AD 226-642). The twin-bird stone artifact and gold tool featuring two winged animals facing each other that were found in Gyeongju, Korea, seem to indicate that the Silla dynasty had adopted these Persian symbols, along with the petal motif surrounding the two artifacts. The petal motif, a pattern made by sewing marbles around a sash, was the traditional pattern of the Sassanid era. The twin lion statues from the Silla and Goryeo eras also seem to parallel the Two Animals Design of the Achaemenid dynasty.

The ethnically Persian Tajik people of Central Asia have a new year's custom of serving food to the village elders who pray for the village's wealth, fortune, and health. Afterwards, homeowners would apply the remaining oil from the *plov* to the necks and horns of cows. They then tied two cows into one yoke and began the spring cultivation of the farmland. This ritual seems to be related to an engraving on a court pillar from the Achaemenid dynasty that shows two cows' heads. The ritual is a prayer for a good harvest and for peace between humans and animals.

The above evidence may resolve many puzzles surrounding Korea's ancient history. The two fishes engraved on the front gate of the Emperor Kimhae Suro's tomb and the fish-shaped designs seen in Buddhist temples are undoubtedly connected to Persian symbolism. The ancient presence of Iranian people in Central Asia and western China likely resulted in the transmission of the Two Fishes Design through India and present-day Pakistan, and from there the imagery disseminated into much of that part of the world.

VII. THE FESTIVAL OF FIRE AND THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NUMBER THIRTEEN

On the last Tuesday night before the new year, Iranians hold an event in which participants jump over a fire and shout, "*Zardi-ye Man Az To, Sorkhi-ye To Az Man,*" meaning, "Take yellowness, illness, and weakness from me. Reddishness, freshness, and healthiness which you have, bestow them on me."³⁰ This event is called *Chahar Shanbe Suri*. *Chahar Shanbe* means Wednesday, and *Suri* means "red like fire." The event is part of the Festival of Fire held on the last Wednesday of the year, but people light bonfires the night before. The all-night fire is believed to protect souls from the power of darkness. Wednesday involves rituals intended to drive away evil spirits and a celebration of spending the day in peace. According to tradition, people believe that the spirits of ancestors visit on the last day of the year, and children wear shrouds, which have a symbolic significance regarding the ancestral visit from the world after death. People beat plates and pots with spoons while walking the streets and sometimes knock on doors to request food. This activity symbolizes beating out the last unlucky Wednesday of the year. The symbolic use of fire in the Iranian new year correlates to the early period of

³⁰ Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1998), p. 7980.

Zoroastrianism, in connection with the ancient Nawruz traditions. In addition, the significance of fire in new-year rituals can be observed in the Korean traditions of burning pine branches in a pile to welcome the first full moon of the lunar calendar, performing the *daljip* (sheaf)-burning ceremony, or participating in the “jwibullori” by burning the ridges between rice paddies and spinning cans of flames. In congruence with the symbolism of the advent of spring, Nawruz also represents the revival of nature. Amongst Ahura Mazda and the festivals that celebrate the holy fire, the most elaborate is Nawruz. Mehrdad Bahar’s book *Jostarie chand dar Farhange Iran* records:

Like observing the crescent moon, there are festivities related to the holy period, such as the monthly signs of the Zodiac, the yearly Nawruz, Mehrgan (Persian festival of autumn since the pre-Islamic era), Sadeh (mid-winter festival observed by Zoroastrians), etc., and some of these festivities had seasonal characteristics as well as other purposes.³¹

From this statement, we can infer that the moon phases emphasized in the Korean and Persian cultural areas were full and crescent, respectively. In Islamic regions, festivities such as Eid-ul-Fetr (end of fasting festival) begin with the appearance of the crescent moon.

Another correlation between Korean tradition and the Festival of Fire can be seen in food rituals. On the Tuesday night of the fire festival, celebrants eat special food and make wishes. Noodle soup is prepared and shared by all, and nuts and dried fruit of seven kinds are handed out to passers-by: pistachios, almonds, hazelnuts, figs, apricots, roasted peas, and raisins. Just as Koreans chew on nuts to ward off boils during the first full moon of the lunar calendar, Iranians chew on nuts or dried fruit called *azil* and pray that the new year will go well. The provision of mixed nuts known as *ajil-e Moshkel-Gosha* (nuts that resolve difficulties) is also a way of expressing gratitude for the health and happiness of the previous year.

In his book *Korea Folk Religious Research*, Korean folklorist Kim Tae Gon classifies new-year rituals into two types: personal ritual and group ritual. He explains that whereas the *daljip* (sheaf)-burning event is regarded as a group ritual event, eating nuts to ward off boils carries personal ritualistic event characteristics. In the Nawruz of Northern Iran and Central Asia, people would play the drums, guitar, and flute, wear traditional new-year clothing, sing, and participate in traditional games such as a wrestling event called the *Koshti* and tug-of-war. These same games mark the celebration of the Korean thanksgiving (*Chusuk*). In Korean festivities including Chusuk, a Pansori performance is held. Pansori is a Korean traditional genre of musical storytelling. The formation of Pansori consists of the connection of poetry and prose.

The connection of poetry and prose appeared in the Gatha of Avesta and was transmitted to India and Europe. The oldest document is the Gatha of ancient Persia. This sort of formation influenced Dunhwang literature in Western China. As a result, the connection between prose and poetry (“Gang” and “Chang” in Chinese characters, respectively) materialized in the combination of Prose-Poetry

³¹ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), p. 210.

Literature known as Gangchang. Thus, “clearly the literature of Prose-Poetry is not unrelated to the Pansori of the Korean novel.”³² Indeed origin of Korean civilizations and cultures has been discussed only in relation with those of China, but the origin of Pansori goes back to the Gatha of Avesta in ancient Persia, through Western China.³³

Nawruz is best known for its Festival of Fire, but there is also a Festival of Water. Water symbolizes creation through the wetting of the earth that causes trees and plants to grow. It also symbolizes washing the body clean from the smokes of winter’s fires. After the all-night fire ritual, Iranians pour water on one another at daybreak. This may correspond to a renowned Nawruz ritual often referred to by historians as the Abpashan event, which features water-pouring rituals and bathing ceremonies. A medieval Egyptian historian, Qalqashandi (1355-1418), mentions that at the first daybreak of the new year, Persian people would go to the spring waters and wash themselves. In relation to the Festival of Water, he writes, “Among Pakistan’s Shia families, the adults will spray rosewater on the faces and hair of family members, with any remaining water being sprayed into the yard or parts of the garden: this custom has been passed down.”³⁴ The Festival of Water has rituals related to praying for rain and the provision of water in the coming year.

To date, scholarship has traced the transmission route of civilization from India to Persia or Central Asia, but it is overwhelmingly evident that civilization and culture in fact began in Persia and spread throughout Central Asia and into South East Asia through present India or Tibet. According to Dr. Syed Sibte Hasan Rizvi in the preface of *Contemporary Persian Poets of Pakistan* (Vol. 1), prior to the sixth century BC, the term Hindu is apt to be used incorrectly, if related to the present India, and the term should be limited to the present Pakistan. With some exceptions, including the dynasty of King Ashoka of Maurya (317-180 BC), ancient Pakistan was typically part of Persianized territory. “Nowadays, some regions of India comprising the great territory had, since ancient times, contained Iranian civilizations and cultures. The ancient memories that are recognized as Indian have their origins in Iran; the civilizations of Mohenjodaro and Harrapa were the same as those of Baluchistan and Sistan.”³⁵ In the aforementioned passage, ‘some regions of India’ stands for the present Pakistan. “Perhaps most people considered the division of India and Pakistan to be unnecessary and unnatural, but according to the historians, sociologists, and archaeologists, such a division has a long root and an ancient record. By contrast, the political combination, which sometimes happened, did not last so long.”³⁶

The features of India’s *Holi* (the Aryan new year) festival or Thailand’s *Songkran* (new year in Sanskrit) festival are similar to those of Nawruz, and therefore there is a need to compare and analyze them in greater depth.

³² Su Woong Lee (1990), p. 168.

³³ Gyu Seob Shin (2008), p. 196.

³⁴ Hashem Razi (2004), p. 163.

³⁵ Omid Ataii (2004), p. 337.

³⁶ Rizvi (1974), p. 1.

In particular, the ceremonial release of captive fishes in the *Songkran* festival is a Buddhist practice rooted in Zoroastrianism. Buddhism is often said to have started from Hinduism, but Buddhism actually emerged from Brahmanism, and the word "Brahman" itself corresponds to the priest figure (*Mogh*) of Zoroastrianism.

To welcome Nawruz, Iran's public institutions enjoy a four-day holiday to celebrate the new year. Educational institutions and most Iranians enjoy the festivities for a period of thirteen days, and because the thirteenth day is regarded as a day of bad omens, everyone goes outdoors to prevent misfortune. This is called *Sizdah Bedar* (The Thirteenth Day in Outdoors) and is the final event of the new-year festivities. The symbolism and significance around the number thirteen began here. "On the thirteenth day, people go outdoors and consider the day unlucky and inauspicious."³⁷ The suspicion originated with the twelve constellations of the zodiac covering the twelve months of the year. Persian tradition held that "each constellation [would] rule the Earth for 1,000 years, and at the end of the last 1,000 years, the sky and the Earth [would] collide and result in chaos. The unluckiness of thirteen was the sign of the falling apart of the last world and system."³⁸

For this reason, Nawruz is celebrated for twelve days, with the thirteenth day signifying a chaotic period. In the last event of the thirteenth day, the *sabze* (traditional herb) raised for the *Haft Sin* is thrown into a flowing stream to symbolize driving evil spirits away from the family. Before the disposal of the *sabze*, it is customary for single women to go outdoors, tie two shoots of grass together, and make a wish to meet their future husbands and get married before the next *Sizdah Bedar*.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The festivals of Eid-ul-Adha (pilgrimage festival) and Eid-ul-Fetr are widely known as Islamic festivals in Korea. In Eid-ul-Adha, pilgrims walk around the Kaaba seven times counterclockwise. From the aspect of number seven symbolism, the impact of Nawruz has traces remaining in this Islamic festivity. For the better recognition of Islam, the media in Korea allot much of their column space to coverage of these celebrations. Yet despite the fact that hundreds of millions of people across Asia celebrate Nawruz, the festival never received any coverage until the media started to report on it following my 2008 public speech in relation to an exhibition on Persian civilization. Although somewhat belated, an in-depth discussion about Nawruz, festivity cultures, and their original forms in different regions, including Iran, the Caucasus, and the Islamic countries of Central Asia must be undertaken.

The aim of this paper has been to confirm the importance of the festival archetype through the example of Nawruz. If the archetype of a festival culture is falsely construed, the result is confusion and misinterpretation of academic and historical documents. For instance, Zoroastrianism had a great impact on the

³⁷ Young Yeon Kim (1997), p. 322.

³⁸ Mehrdad Bahar (1994), pp. 214-215.

ideology of Taoism; therefore, Taoism cannot be considered independently, or its complete meaning will be lost or stifled. This is also true of the ancient Greek civilization, which is considered the heart of European civilizations. Prevailing scholarship considers Greek civilization entirely apart from that of ancient Persia. This has led to academic distortion of many cultural, religious, and historical elements.

Part of the objective of this paper is to stimulate intellectual curiosity among Korean academics through an appeal to valued symbols, such as the numbers seven and thirteen, the Two Fishes Design, and the Festival of Fire. These facets of Persian culture have permeated various Eastern and Western customs and regions, including Korea. It is my belief that discovering the true historical roots of such customs could resolve a number of academic disputes.

China and India are usually considered the birthplace of Asian civilization. The Persian influence on China and India has largely been forgotten, and Persia is regarded as a “lost civilization.” Nonetheless, Persian civilization transmitted countless traditions and symbols to India, Tibet, South Eastern Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. The Persian cultural world in the ancient era consisted of Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the western region (Xinjiang) of China. Considering the vast expanse of Persia’s influence as a cultural archetype, surprisingly little research has been accomplished in this area.

Religion, mythology, and festivals are at the heart of ancient studies. This paper has mainly considered Nawruz in terms of cultural aspects. In the future, I would like to further my research on other festivities (Sadeh and Mehregan, etc.) connected with Zoroastrianism.³⁹

REFERENCES

- Ataï, Omid. *Peiyambare Aryaïi* [Aryan prophet]. Tehran: Entesharate Ataï, 2004.
- Bahar, Mehrdad. *Jostarie chand dar Farhange Iran* [Some investigations into Iranian culture]. Tehran: Entesharate Fekruz, 1994.
- Dehkhoda, Ali Akbar. *Loghatname-ye-Dehkhoda* [Dehkhoda encyclopedia], Vol. 5, No. 15. Entesharate-Daneshgah-Tehran, 1998
- Jeong, Su II. *The History of Ancient Civilizations Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 2. Seoul: Sagyejeol, 2001.
- Kim, Young Yeon. *Iranian Food Culture Which Has Strong Religious Characteristics, Eastern Culture Observed with Food*. Seoul: Daehan Textbooks, 1997.
- Lee, Su Woong. *Dunhuang Literature and Arts*. Seoul: Konkuk University, 1990.
- Mase, Henry, Rane Grouse, Henry Sharol, A. Bonifacio, G. Dumezil, R. Gershman, & Dupont Sumer. *Iran va Falsafeye Yunan* [Iran and philosophy of Greece]. In *Tarikhe Tamadone Iran* [The history of civilization in Iran], Mohi, Javad (trans.) Tehran: Entesharate Gutenberg, 2003.
- Mozd, Gholamreza Tabatabayi. *Dayeratul Moaref Masur Zarin* [Encyclopaedia of Masur Zarin], Vol. 1. Tehran: Entesharate Zarin, 1995.

³⁹ This work (corresponding author: Lee Jong Oh, e-mail: santon@hufs.ac.kr) was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund.

- Razi, Hashem. *Dine Ghadime Iran* [The ancient Iranian religion]. Tehran: Entesharate Asia, 1964.
- _____. *Jashinha-ye Ab* [The festivities of water/Abpashan]. Tehran: Entesharate Behjat, 2004.
- Rizvi, Syed Sibte Hasan. *Farsiguyan-e-Pakistan* [The Persian poets in Pakistan], Vol. I. Rawalpindi: Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, 1974.
- Shahab, Sotudeh-Nejad. *Baztabe Tamadonhaye Parthia-Sassanid bar Se Padshahi dar Shabe Jajireye Kore* [The discovery of Persian (Parthian and Sassanid) cultural elements in the heritage of “the Three Kingdoms” of Korea]. Tehran: Ashianeye Ketab, 2004.
- _____. *Selseleye Yamato dar Japon va Tamadone Bastaniye Pars* [The Yamato dynasty of Japan and ancient civilization of Persia]. Tehran: Ashianeye Ketab, 2005.
- Shin, Gyu Seob. “The Influence of Persian Language and Literature on Urdu Language and Literature.” *Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1, Institute of South Asian Studies (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies), 2001.
- _____. “The Comparison and Analysis of the *Thousand and One Nights* (*Hezar-o-Yek Shab*) in Korean Translated Texts: The Issue of Translation and Interpretation in the “Tale of the Fisherman and Ifrit.” *Journal of the Comparative Study of World Literature* (Vol. 23). The Association of Comparative Study of World Literature, 2008.
- _____. “The Food Culture of Iran and Pakistan.” *Journal of Ferment Culture*, Vol. 1, Institute of Ferment Culture (Seoul Women’s University), 2010.
- _____. “The Meaning of the Silk Road and Independent Interpretation from the View of Persia.” *The Korea Journal of Chinese Affairs*, Vol. 2. Institute for the Future of Korea–China Relations (Dongduk Women’s University), 2014a.
- _____. “The Influence of Ancient Religious Culture on Medieval Persian Poetry–Focusing on the Poem of Omar Khayyam.” *Journal of the Comparative Study of World Literature*, Vol. 47. The Association of Comparative Study of World Literature, 2014b.