**House and home in the world outlook of different cultures**

Essay in Cross-cultural studies

Minsk 2008

Contents

Introduction

1. The choice of the place for the future house. 4

2. The choice of the time of the beginning of the construction works. 8

3. The process of house building. 9

4. A typical house, its orientation and structure. 11

5. The main zones of the house:

5.1. The zone of entrance. 13

5.2. The zone of cooking. 16

5.3. The zone of sleeping. 17

5.4. The zone of the sacred. 18

6. The difference in the attitude towards some objects:

6.1. A table. 19

6.2. A mirror. 20

Conclusion

References

House, as well as food, water and clothes is essential for man`s life. But a human being differs from animals; he wants to have not just a shelter but a place to satisfy all his necessities: to sleep, to eat, to hide himself from bad weather, to raise children, to worship God, etc. So he wants not just a house but a home. There are a lot of proverbs supporting the importance of home to a person: *East or west, home* *is best*; *There is no place like home*; *My house is my fortress*; and others. Such sayings exist in any language and in any culture. A house is a microlevel model of the Universe, so one can find a definite structure in it. Any house has zones with a special predestination, sacred objects, and there are always certain rules of living in a house. These zones, objects and rules differ from one culture to another, depending on the world outlook of a certain community, which in its turn has its roots in the religion of a nation, its traditions and historic heritage. That is why there are so many types of houses and ways of life in the world.

A person`s home as well as his spoken language and festive clothes can tell us what culture he belongs to, because consciously or unconsciously, one usually keeps to one`s native traditions, though it is rather difficult to do so in the modern world, especially in the city. Nevertheless, it is always very interesting to look deeper into the culture of other peoples` and of course into your own one and to try to compare them in any respect.

I am going to look at the Slavonic, Chinese and Madagascarian traditions concerning home. Slavonic – because Belarus is a Slavonic country; Chinese – because their traditions are very popular in our country as well as in the whole world; Madagascarian – to compare these two with something extremely exotic. I must mention that Slavonic traditions are close to those in other European countries as Europe has been Christian since the earliest times; Chinese traditions are also widespread in other Asian countries; and Madagascarian ones are stuck to in many African countries and on the isles of the Indian Ocean. Thus, comparing the three types of traditional culture I shall compare the outlook of three large regions of the world. It is rather difficult to find the roots of this difference; they probably lie in the mentality of nations worked up for thousands of years. Slavonic traditions are based on the Christian way of life, though one still can see there a strong influence of popular beliefs. The basis for the Chinese way of life is the understanding of the Universe as a mixture of different kinds of energy. As for Malagasies, they live in accordance with the belief that spirits rule the world. So any aspect of building a house has its own rules different from those in other cultures and sometimes even opposite to them.

I believe the best way to compare the traditions concerning home is to bring together the three points of view on one particular subject and to look for the difference. So it is necessary to single out the points on which the comparison will be based. In any culture the following points are taken into consideration when building a house: the choice of the time and the place of building, the process of building, the typical structure of a house, the main zones singled out in a house and on the territory around it, the main objects used in the house and the rules of people`s behaviour at home. So my task is to find the points of similarity and difference between three cultures in this respect by means of consequent comparison.

1. The choice of the place for the future house.

Slavonic tradition says that the Earth has good and bad places: in good places temples are built, in bad ones cemeteries are placed. A house should be built in a good place, otherwise the family living in it will never be happy. The ways of finding out whether the place is good are as follows:

1) Places where poultry and cattle like to stay for the rest are considered good;

2) Places where black ants make their ant-hills are also thought very good ones. An ant-hill is carefully removed to the future building site and if the ants do not run away from this place, a house is then built there.

The number of places considered to be bad is much greater. In the past people used to pass the history of their town or village through generations, and all the places where something bad had ever happened were looked upon as bad ones. Thus, houses should not be built:

1) near cemeteries;

2) in the places where a person was killed or a battle happened in the past;

3) in the place where at least one fruit tree was stubbed up, not to say about a garden;

4) in the place of a former rye or wheat field;

5) in the places connected with fire, e. g. sites of a fire or places ever struck by a lightening;

6) in the places of old abandoned roads and crossroads, mills and wells;

7) on marshlands, disposal sites or places used for cattle slaughter;

8) in the places of some borders, e.g. between gardens;

9) in the places where grass does not grow for some unknown reason;

10) in the places connected with some accident, e.g. where a person fell off a horse and broke his leg. [2; 497]

In the absence of these bad indicators the place is considered appropriate even if there are no good indicators either.

In the Chinese culture the choice of a good place is based on other notions, though it has a great prominence, too. An ideal place is the one where the four heavenly animals are represented and harmonized; they are the Dragon, the Tiger, the Turtle and the Phoenix. The Dragon is the symbol of happiness. It is represented by the landscape with hills of a medium size; it is said that they are the best for the universal energy Chi to move freely and to do good to the people living in this place. High hills are avoided as they are obstacles for the movement of Chi; flat country is also avoided as in this case the energy flies away from the place. The East is the Dragon`s part of the world, that is why medium-size hills should be on the left (eastern) side of the house.

The Tiger is a balancing opposition to the Dragon; its part of the world is the West, its type of the landscape is low-hilled.

The Turtle is the symbol of help, constancy and longevity. Its part of the world is the North. The Turtle is represented by low hills.

The Phoenix bird symbolizes new possibilities. Its part of the world is the South and the landscape with very low hills, though not flat country. [3; 16]

Thus, the choice of the best place for the future house is made in accordance with the landscape. The ideal place is the one where the highest hills are on the left (eastern) side of the house, lower hills on the right side and behind the house. In front of the house there should be very low hills. If the house is not isolated, but is in a town or a village, the role of the hills is played by other houses.

There are also some other indicators for the place to be good. It is great if there is a river in front of the house, but it should make a turn, not to run straight, otherwise the positive energy Chi will pass by the house without influencing people. The river should also not run too fast or too slowly because everything should have a measure.

The role of the river can also be played by a road. A crossroads and a confluence of rivers is also a good place if only the house does not face the acute angle, as acute angles, pikes and any sharp objects directed towards the house accumulate the bad energy Sha Chi, which destroys the peace and happiness and needs to be protected from.

In Madagascarian culture the place for a house is chosen in accordance with the beliefs different from those in Slavonic and Chinese traditions. There are two main points to remember about when choosing a proper place: the position of the house in accordance with the landscape and in relation to some other buildings. The rules of placing a house with respect to the landscape are as follows:

1) The house should not be placed on the poor soil, otherwise the family will always be poor;

2) It should not be placed in a swampy place, because the water there is ‘dead’ (unlike the water in rivers). This water will cause many troubles to the family up to death;

3) A place near a river is a good one unless it is a place where the river divides into two or more branches, as it is said that the family will follow its fate and will be ruined as a result of the negative influence of such a place;

4) A house should not be placed near a lake or a waterfall, because these are the places where spirits live. Only wizards ever go to the waterfalls where they communicate with gods. Ordinary people never dare to approach waterfalls;

5) The entrance to a valley is a bad place because the spirits living in the valley will worry people to death. A house should not be placed in the highest part of the valley either because the health, the wealth and the happiness of the family will run down the valley and away from the house. If a valley is the only possible place, then a special stone is used to protect the family. It is called a ‘male stone’ and is placed near the house. It is believed to neutralize negative energy as sacrifices are made there to gain the favour of the spirits;

6) A house should not be placed on the top of or opposite a high steep rock or a mountain peak because they are said to have stronger fortune than people can have, so the fortune of the family will be destroyed by the strength of the mountain. Moreover, sacrifices are often made in the mountains, which enforces the negative energy;

7) Neither should a house be built near the place of a recent landslip. The danger is said to be not so much of a possible new landslip, but of the gulf into which a person can fall (both physically and spiritually);

8) One more place considered to be bad is the one where birds do not want to build their nests. It is believed that they feel the future misfortune, so people should also avoid such places. [1; 106]

This was a list of rules helping to find a good place from the point of view of the landscape. There is also a set of rules to follow in order not to break one of the strongest Madagascarian traditions – the respect to the elders. These rules are:

1) A son`s house cannot be built to the North or to the East from the father`s house, because these parts of the world are the best ones and if the son breaks this rule it means that he wants to live in a better place than his father and does not respect him. All the neighbours will despise him for that. And the house should be smaller than the father`s (for the same reason);

2) A house should be properly oriented according to the family tomb. People should not live to the North of it because Malagasies sleep and place the dead with the feet towards the South. If they break this rule it seems that the living kick the ancestors` heads with their feet which is unacceptable. A house should not be placed on a lower level than that of the tomb, otherwise the dead will affect the living negatively. [1; 108]

2. The choice of the time of the beginning of the construction works.

One of the main Slavonic traditions says ‘the beginning determines the end’. That is why the choice of the proper time for a house building is so important (it is no less important for other cultures, although the principles of choosing the best time are different up to the opposite). The following circumstances are taken into consideration: the time of the year, the phase of the Moon, the day of the week, the part of the day, some other dates important to the future lodgers.

The best time of the year for building is that between Radunitsa (the day of the remembrance of the late ancestors – the 9th day after Easter) and Whitsunday (the 49th day after Easter). The Moon should be in the growing phase. The 7th day after the full moon is also appropriate. These phases promise long life to the family. As for the days of the week, there are good and bad ones. Monday is a bad day, as it is called ‘a difficult day’ and is inappropriate for any undertakings. Wednesday and Friday are also bad days, as these are the days of the fasting. Saturday is the remembrance day, so it is not appropriate either. Moreover, the latter three are called ‘female days’ in the Slavonic world, and as building is not a women`s occupation, these days do not fit the purpose. Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday are considered to be good days. As for the time of the day, it is best to start building before the very dawn or from 9 to 12 a.m. It is believed that the well-being of the family will grow on the analogy of the growing day.

In Ukraine the days of worship to the saints–protectors of family life are recognized as good ones. For Belarusians there is one more good day – the birthday of the host of the future house. The day recognized as bad is the one on which there is an unburied dead person in the village.

For the Chinese the time is not so important as the place. It is said that any undertaking will have a good end if it is begun in the beginning of the year and on the growing phase of the moon. In this case the well-being of the people will grow.

Unlike the Chinese, Malagasies pay great attention to the time of the building. As for the season, it should not be spring or summer, because in this case building can cause bad crops. But the 1st day of the 3rd, the 4th or the 5th months of the year (called Adizauza, Asurutani and Alakhasati respectively, which corresponds to May, June and July as the year on Madagascar begins in March) is considered favourable. It should be neither Thursday nor Sunday, otherwise the family will be very poor. And it should never be the birthday of the host or his father. This taboo is based on the belief that everything has its own fortune. People born and undertakings made on the same day of the year are said to share one fortune. In such cases one of them is stronger in this respect, so the other will have to give in. Man is said to be weak, so the house having a stronger fortune than a man can cause a lot of misfortune to the host up to his premature death.

3. The process of house building.

In Slavonic culture the greatest importance in the building process is given to the laying the first row of logs, according to the principle ‘the beginning determines the end’. A lot of magic actions are done for the house to have a good fortune as the building of a new house is associated with the creation of a new world.

Firstly, the host prays to the God asking for his help. Then the work itself begins. A house should be built beginning from the eastern side (the side of the red corner – the place in the house where sacred objects are kept) and following the movement of the Sun. A hole is made in the first log in the place of the future red corner and such objects as a slice of bread, a handful of wheat, some coins and a flock of sheep`s wool are put in there. This is done for the family to be rich. Such objects as an Easter candle and a piece of glass are buried in the ground under the red corner in order to scare away the evil spirit. When the first row of logs is laid, the process stops for one day, after that it continues. The number of rows is usually 13. Twelve rows create the living space for the family and the 13th serves as a channel connecting people with the other world, the world of the ancestors who help the living. The number 12 is connected with the number of the God`s apostles; it is also looked upon as the result of multiplication of the four parts of the world on the three notions of time (past, present and future).

When the logs are laid, the roof is raised. Usually it has two pitch slopes. The upper part of the roof is called the finial (in Russian – ‘konyok’, literally meaning ‘a horse’, as it is a horse who takes men to gods after death).

During the whole period of building strangers, pregnant women, widows and widowers are not allowed to come to the building site as they bring negative energy. The end of the construction works is celebrated by the family, their relatives and neighbours.

The Chinese also have some methods to make the house happy. After the place is chosen, the family prays gods and spirits for help. Then such objects as a mirror, some coins and red ribbons are buried on the building site to provide the family with wealth and happiness. When the construction is finished, there is a great celebration with many guests invited.

Madagascarian traditions of house building are more complicated. A wizard is invited to the building site to do some magic actions scaring away bad luck and evil spirits. He uses such objects as a broken knife, aloe leaves, some honey and white quartz. The knife is going to cut the connection between the living and the dead, so that the former could live in peace. Aloe leaves symbolize the bitterness of misfortune, as aloe sap tastes very bitter. Honey is predestined to propitiate the late ancestors, so that they do not return to this world to break the peace. White quartz is called ‘the stone of life’. Like a ‘male stone’, it protects the family from the strength of death. All these objects are buried near the house. Then a hole is dug in the centre of the site and four more holes for the supporting posts of the house. The a sacrificial hen is killed and its blood is sprinkled into the holes. A bit of soil from the northern side of the site is thrown southward for the bad to go to the South, as the South is the direction of the bad luck.

The person who lays the foundation should be a young and strong man, but not too young as he will be unable to resist the power of the Earth which can take his life energy from him. The most important condition is that this person`s father must be alive, as on Madagascar there is a very strong cult of reverence of the father. People whose fathers live long are considered to have a very good destiny and any undertaking of theirs is said to be blessed.

4. A typical house, its orientation and structure.

A Slavonic village is oriented according to the Milky Way: the main street corresponds to it and lies in the direction from East to West. The houses are placed perpendicularly to the road, with their blind walls towards the North and windows towards the South. There are usually two windows looking at the road and two or three windows looking at the yard. The former two serve as the channels connecting people living in the house with the Sun (because these windows are the closest ones to the red corner), and the latter ones are said to connect people with the Moon. The number of the windows looking at the yard is three because they symbolize a traditional Slavonic family which consists of three generations of people.

A typical house is one-storey. The inner space of the house is divided into three parts, each of which has its own predestination and determines the life of the lodgers and the behaviour of the guests. The borders between the three zones are indicated by two tie-beams holding the ceiling. The space from the first to the second beam is for the people entering the house; here guests are received. The space from the second to the third beam belongs to the lodgers; here they work, eat, sleep. The third zone with the red corner is sacred. Here icons and other ritual objects are kept and the family prays the God. This is the horizontal structure of the house according to its length.

There is also the division of the house according to its width. The house is diagonally divided into the left and the right halves with the border passing from the hearth to the red corner. In the Slavonic world outlook the left side is considered to be the ‘female side’; here the hearth is situated. The right side is called the ‘male side’; this is the place for men.

Vertically the house has three levels; it is considered to be a microlevel model of the Universe. The upper level is for the gods; the lowest level – for the late ancestors; the middle – for the family. The garret is the place where spirits live, that is why there is a special window there for them to move in and out. The middle part of the house is for people to live in. The lowest part, including the threshold, the cellar and the place under the stove is the place for the dead ancestors, that is why the umbilical cord of a new-born child should be buried there (that of a girl – near the threshold, that of a boy – near the red corner).

A typical Chinese house is two-storey. The first floor is for the host and his wife; children live upstairs. The best form for the house is rectangular (gives success and constancy to the family) and square (gives stability). A house with more than four angles, especially if it is unsymmetrical, accumulates negative energy; a house in the form of a circle lacks stability and endangers the strength of the family. The best form for the area around the house is a regular one: a circle, a square or a rectangle. Unsymmetrical and angular forms are unfavourable as negative energy accumulates in such places. The way to correct such a situation is to hide the corners behind the fence. If the main entrance faces a sharp angle it is best to use another door or to build a porch. The best position for the house on the area around it is in the centre.

The direction in which the door or a window looks may be different. The family is free to choose any direction they prefer depending on what objects they pursue:

- the North – if they want to live a very quiet and peaceful life;

- the South – if they like an active way of life and often invite guests;

- the East is good for young people, especially creative ones;

- the West is the best direction for the families with children; it helps children grow happy and creative;

- the North–West is good for men – they will be highly respected in the family;

- the South–West is good for women – it makes the marriage stronger and strengthens the role of the mother in the family;

- the North-East helps good education;

- the South-East helps enrichment. [3; 38]

Thus we can see that there is not a single forbidden direction for the door to look in. Neither there is any for the windows: they may also look in any direction according to the rules stated above.

A typical Madagascarin house is two-storey and made of bricks. The roof is made of reed or flat tile. The walls are covered with red clay. The floor is earthen and covered with mats. On each floor there are two rooms: one larger and one smaller. One of the larger rooms is used as both the bedroom and the sitting-room. In the other room corn is stored.

The house is oriented according to the parts of the world. It should be directed from North to South. If it is directed from West to East, then the Nature will make the family leave the house sooner or later. All the doors and windows must look westward. If they look southward, the host is believed to become a wizard; if eastward, he will lose his wife; if northward, the house will inevitably be struck by a lightening.

The inner space of the house is also divided in accordance with the parts of the world. The southern part of the house is for the host; here he sleeps as it is believed to be the best past of the house. In the south-eastern part the basket with talismans is placed. In the eastern part the jar with drinking water is placed. In the western corner poultry is kept. The southern part of the house is the part of the material wealth; rice is kept there. The hearth is placed in the centre of the house or closer to the southern wall. Guests are received in the south-eastern part of the house.

5. The main zones of the house.

5.1. The zone of entrance.

The door is the place of entrance and exit. On the one hand, it symbolizes a border between the house and the yard, on the other hand, it ensures protection and access. The open door connects people with the world, the closed door protects the family from the outside invasion. Slavonic tradition pays great attention to this zone.

The closed position of the door is considered right. The door can be left open only if some extraordinary event has happened to the family – if one of the members has died or has been born. In these cases the door is left open to give the way to the soul of the dying or a newborn person. During the funeral procession the door should be kept open until the body is carried out of the house. Then the door should be closed or even locked for the soul not to return. Those who come to take leave of the dead must leave through the same door they entered the house. In the wedding ceremony the door the door also plays an important role. The mother-in-law should close the door with her back after letting in the new-married couple so that the daughter-in-law will never leave the family.

There is also a rule for everyday life: litter should be from the remote wall to the door, i.e. from ‘your’ space to the ‘space of strangers’. Only at the funeral it should be swept from the door to the centre of the house.

The door as a protector can be decorated with a horseshoe, a knife, needles and other objects usually used to protect oneself from negative energy. After a funeral, a wedding and a christening the door should be washed with holy water to wash away the energy of a large number of guests.

The threshold also belongs to the zone of entrance. It symbolizes the border between the world of living people (the house) and the world of the ancestors (under the house). There are definite rules of behaviour concerning this zone:

- people should avoid talking or giving something over the threshold so as not to worry the ancestors;

- unmarried people should not stand or sit on the threshold, otherwise they will not get married;

- pregnant women should not sit on the threshold for the delivery not to be difficult;

- after the christening the baby is put on the threshold to be accepted to the family by the ancestors;

- the bridegroom carries the bride over the threshold so that the ancestors do not object to the entrance of a new person into the family;

- before leaving home for some other place a person should take a seat on the threshold to get the protection of the ancestors in his trip;

- strange and unusual things that may appear near the threshold must not be touched, as they can have been brought by people who wish to do something bad to the family. [2; 519]

According to the Chinese tradition, the stream of positive energy Chi enters the house through the main door. Any obstacle in front of the door prevents it from entering, so the space here should be empty. If the obstacle cannot be removed away, the door should be painted the colour corresponding the part of the world it looks at. The colours are: black for the North, green for the East, red and orange for the South, white for the West. The space before the door should be brightly lit.

The space behind the door should be enclosed for Chi not to leave the house if the back door is directly opposite the main entrance. There should not be other doors, leading to the rooms, in the same wall as the main door or directly opposite to it. If there are, they must be kept closed.

If there is a staircase right behind the door, it is a bad sign. Such a situation needs correction. If the staircase goes upwards, it can cause diseases to the family. The remedy is to make a threshold to step over the line between the door and the first step. If the staircase goes downwards, it does not let the family to become rich. In such cases a mirror should be placed on the outer side of the house to reflect the negative energy.

As for the Malagasies, they say the door must be strong to protect the family from any unwanted influence from outside. As stated above, it must look westward and should not squeak as this sound can call the spirits to the house and they will disturb the lodgers. In the daytime it is left open as a sign of hospitality and is closed for the night.

5.2. The zone of cooking.

The zone of cooking is represented by the stove. The structure of the stove repeats the structure of the house which in its turn resembles the structure of the Universe: the place under the stove symbolizes the past (cf. with the cellar), the stove itself – the present (cf. with the house), the chimney symbolizes the future (cf. with the garret).

The fire should not be put out for the night. There is a special hollow in the stove where coals are gathered for the night to be used again the next day. The fire is put out only in two cases:

1) if somebody died in the house; then the stove stays cold for three days;

2) during an epidemic; all the stoves in a village should be put out. Then the life-giving fire – the one got by rubbing - is passed from house to house.

The stove should be closed with an oven-door when not used so that the wealth does not leave the family. The chimney should be kept closed with a damper for the house not to be struck by a lightening. When moving to a new house, some coals should be taken from the old stove and put into the new one as they symbolize the happiness of the family.

The Chinese use to choose the western or the northern part of the house for the stove and the kitchen. The stove should be seen very well from the door. The door should not set against any furniture, there must be enough space for the door to open freely. The stove and the sink should be placed as far from each other as possible since they represent different kinds of energy – those of the fire and of the water. Different energies in close contact cause distress to the lodgers. The shelves in the kitchen should have doors and be kept closed. The window-sills should be free of any objects and the curtains should be drawn back for the energy to move freely.

On Madagascar the stove is placed on three stones in the centre of the house. It can also be built in the southern part of the house to neutralize negative energy coming from the South as the South is considered to be the worst part of the world. The guests sit northward to the stove. The first person to make fire in the hearth in a new house is the host. He also prepares the first food which is considered blessed.

5.3. The zone of sleeping.

The place people use for sleeping is subject to numerous regulations concerning its position and the orientation of sleeping people according to the parts of the world. These rules differ from one culture to another as they are dictated by the world outlook of nations.

Slavs are free to choose any place in the house they like except for the red corner which is sacred and predestined to ritual use. Babies and old people should sleep on the stove as it is believed to give them the vital energy they need. It is forbidden to sleep with one`s feet towards the door as only the dead can be placed in such a way. Sleeping in front of a mirror is considered harmful as the mirror takes the strength away from the sleeping person. As for the direction of a person, it is best to sleep with one`s head to the North and never to the East as the dead are usually placed with their heads to the East (to the red corner).

The Chinese say that different people should choose different places for sleeping. Calm people should sleep in the northern part of the house; energetic ones – in the southern part; the eastern part is the best for the young. People of any age wishing to bring more romance into their life should choose the western part of the house. Some places are said to be unfavourable for the purpose: any place on the ground floor as the ground is connected with death; the place on the first floor right above the kitchen; the room the door of which looks at the main door or a staircase. The best form for the bedroom is square.

The place for the bed in the room is chosen individually. The rules of the placement of the main door are applied here. One more rule states that one should not sleep with his feet towards the door or the window; the worst place for the bed is on the line ‘door – window’. Nevertheless, the door should be well seen from the bed. There should be no mirrors against the bed and no shelves near the head of it.

Malagasies use to sleep on mats instead of beds; still there are certain rules concerning the sleeping place, too. Great importance is given to the direction of the head of a sleeping person. Men sleep by the eastern wall with their head to the North or East. Women and children sleep to the South from the stove with their heads to the East. It is forbidden to sleep with the head to the South as only wizards do so. Children can never sit or lie on the place the adults sleep on as they show their disrespect to the elders if do so.

These are the zones recognized in all the three cultures, but there are other zones, typical only of some of them. One of such zones is the red corner in Slavonic culture, which is not singled out in the Chinese and Madagascarian ones because of the difference in their religious beliefs.

5.4. The zone of the sacred.

This is the most important part in a Slavonic house without which it cannot exist. The red corner is one of the eastern corners of the house, namely the one placed diagonally to the stove. It has the status of a church altar. Its space is divided into two levels. On the upper level the icon is placed. The icon connects two walls: a long wall, symbolizing the hosts, and a short one which symbolizes the relatives of the wife and the daughter-in-law. Some sacred things (first hair of the children, church candles, holy salt, an Easter egg, etc.) are kept behind the icon and used in some extraordinary situations. The lower level is used to keep the results of a person`s activity. The first or the last sheaf is placed there and kept for a year as a symbol of a good crop.

Entering the house, every person should cross himself and take a bow to the icon to show the respect to the God and to the family. Only after that any talking to the hosts is permitted.

The place under the icon is sacred and there are strict rules as to the possibility to sit there. At the christening party the godparents sit there; at the wedding – the newly-married couple with the godparents on both sides; at the funeral ceremony the place at the table under the red corner is given to the oldest person present.

The icon must be handled with special care. It must not be stolen, burnt or used for any non-ritual aims. Old icons should be buried at the cemetery. It is preferable that every member of the family has an icon in honour of the saint whose name he has.

6. The difference in the attitude towards some objects.

Some objects used in a house may get different attitude towards themselves as a result of the cultural differences. Such commonly used things as a table and a mirror have acquired the greatest ritual meaning of all the objects in a house and become subjects to many regulations in Belarusian and Chinese cultures. In Madagascarian culture, though, these objects are not so important as they are not used. People eat on a mat near the stove instead of a table and do not have mirrors in the house as they are said to have come from evil spirit who wants to make people selfish and destroy close relationships which are characteristic of Malagasies. That is why only two cultures will be compared in this respect, Belarusian and Chinese ones.

6.1. A table.

For Belarusians the table is the symbol of prosperity of the family. It should be covered with a white table-cloth. People should never eat at an uncovered table, otherwise the family will lose its wealth. It is forbidden to sit on the table as it is the place for food which is considered sacred. The table should be cleaned after every meal for evil spirit not to eat what is left. Still, on the remembrance days the table should be left with the food for a night so that the souls of the ancestors could come to eat. A wedding table should have Г- or П-form. The guests should be placed facing each other. A funeral table should have the form of a straight line. Nobody should sit at the far ends as this table symbolizes the road leading the soul to the other world, so no one should be on its way. A rule for everyday life is that one should not bang with the tableware. It is believed that this sound worries the ancestors.

In Chinese culture the table is one of the main places where Chi accumulates and if the rules are not followed, then the positive energy Chi can turn into the negative energy Sha Chi. The dining-table should be large. If it is oval or octagonal – then all other furniture in the kitchen should be rectangular or square and vice versa. The tableware should be round or octagonal. The colour of the table-cloth depends on the part of the world; that is if the table is in the southern part of the kitchen, the table-cloth should be red; if it is in the northern part – blue; in the eastern – green; in the western – white. If any plants are placed on the table, they should have round leaves. The colour of the flowers is determined by the same rules as those used for choosing the colour of the table-cloth.

6.2. A mirror.

In Belarusian culture mirrors are thought to be the channels connecting people with the other world, that is why they are often used in fortune-telling. A mirror is a strong protector from evil eye, so small mirrors are hidden in the pockets for the sake of one`s safety. Broken mirrors should not be looked in – they should be buried. Children under a year should not be shown into the mirror. If there is a dead person in the house, all the mirrors should be curtained for the death not to look for another victim. When there is a party in the house, all the mirrors should be washed after the guests leave. This is done to wash away bad energy.

In China mirrors are said to have a property of doubling the qualities of the objects reflected, both good and bad ones. So one should make sure that only useful objects are reflected in the mirror. Mirrors should be placed in such a way that the bed and the main door do not reflect in them. Mirrors should be large enough in order not to ‘cut’ the top of the head of the tallest member of the family, otherwise his health will be hampered. Mirrors composed of pieces should not be used either for the same reason.

Thus one can see that usual objects acquire ritual meaning in the popular culture. Moreover, their meanings and predestination differ greatly depending on a certain culture.

In conclusion I would like to say that though the rules of popular culture are not considered so important in the modern world, they should not be disregarded. One never knows what can happen in future. That is why these rules may be useful to a person: they can be resorted to as a means to avoid any future troubles, because everyone knows it is better to prevent problems than to handle the after-effects. One can notice the tendency towards leading life in some exotic way. More and more people nowadays furnish their houses according to Chinese, Indian or other popular traditions. This is not bad if one knows the tradition of one`s own culture, because one can notice not only differences but also some points of opposition in the rules stated above. It is better not to risk and at least avoid ambiguous situations especially if it concerns one`s house – the place where a person spends the best part of life.

References

1. Корочанцев В.А. Мадагаскар – остров загадок.// В.А. Корочанцев. – М., Дрофа, 2003. – 384с.

2. Котович О.В., Крук И.И. Золотые правила народной культуры.// О.В.Котович, И.И. Крук. – Минск, Адукацыя i выхаванне, 2008. – 592с.

3. Hobson Wendy. Simply Feng-Shui for home, office and garden.// Wendy Hobson. – London, Foulsham, 1998. – 288p.