

The Philosophy of Life Found in Eastern Tales

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Abstract:

Folklore and oral tradition have long served as vessels for transmitting societal values, ethics, and cultural continuity. In Eastern civilizations, such narratives encapsulate the philosophical foundations of moral behavior and collective wisdom. This article investigates how Chinese folk tales and proverbs embody essential life principles such as patience, morality, intergenerational respect, and persistence, all of which resonate with the cultural worldview of Uzbek society. While many studies address the aesthetic or literary value of folklore, fewer have explored its psychopedagogical and philosophical influence across Eastern cultures in a comparative context. The study aims to identify common moral and philosophical motifs in Eastern tales—particularly Chinese legends—and demonstrate their relevance to Uzbek traditional values and societal formation. By analyzing narratives such as "The Old Horse Knows the Way" and the story of Li Bai, the study reveals recurring themes of wisdom through experience, ethical conduct, and perseverance. These stories parallel Uzbek proverbs and folk practices that emphasize similar values, showing a shared cultural ethos. The article bridges Chinese and Uzbek folklore to argue for a common Eastern philosophical foundation that prioritizes ancestral guidance, ethical upbringing, and social harmony. These findings suggest that reintegrating traditional narratives into educational and societal discourse can strengthen identity, promote ethical behavior, and support the formation of a more cohesive and morally anchored society in a modernizing world.

Keywords: Individual, Society, Tradition, Folklore, Hard Work, Human Values

Introduction

The philosophy of life embedded in Eastern folklore and oral traditions serves as a rich source of ethical, cultural, and educational values that remain relevant across generations. Tales passed down among Eastern peoples, particularly in Chinese and Central Asian cultures, reflect a deeply rooted

understanding of human nature, resilience, and societal balance [1]. These narratives are not mere stories; they are moral compasses shaped by centuries of lived experience, intergenerational wisdom, and community-based knowledge. Despite their geographic and linguistic differences, these tales convey universal truths through local idioms, metaphorical expressions, and instructive plots. However, modern society's increasing detachment from historical consciousness and intergenerational continuity threatens this cultural inheritance. The article underscores that failures in building morally sound societies often stem from forgetting or neglecting one's roots—be it ancestral, cultural, or moral [2]. By analyzing examples from Chinese legends such as “If You Keep Grinding, Even a Hammer Can Become a Needle,” “Turning Back Halfway,” and “The Old Horse Knows the Way,” and juxtaposing them with analogous Uzbek proverbs and stories, the study highlights a shared Eastern worldview that prioritizes patience, respect for elders, diligence, and moral clarity. These narratives serve not only as cultural artifacts but also as pedagogical tools that guide youth in forming a life philosophy rooted in justice, perseverance, and familial duty. This paper argues for a renewed emphasis on folkloric wisdom as a means to nurture ethical consciousness, reinforce cultural continuity, and contribute to the formation of harmonious societies in a rapidly changing world [3].

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative, analytical, and interpretive methodology aimed at exploring the educational, ethical, and philosophical values embedded in Eastern folk tales, with a focus on Chinese narratives[4]. The research primarily involved textual and content analysis of selected oral and written sources, including classic Chinese legends such as “The Old Horse Knows the Way,” “If You Keep Grinding, Even a Hammer Can Become a Needle,” and “Turning Back Halfway.” These were examined alongside comparable Uzbek proverbs, hadiths, and traditional stories to identify thematic parallels and pedagogical insights[5]. The approach was comparative in nature, highlighting shared motifs like patience, respect for elders, moral integrity, and perseverance. The researcher extracted key philosophical lessons conveyed through metaphor and symbolism, carefully interpreting each tale in its cultural context and comparing it with similar moral teachings in Uzbek folklore and literary heritage. Secondary sources such as annotated texts, historical commentaries, and ethical studies were also consulted to reinforce the interpretation of figurative elements and their relevance to modern social education[6]. Additionally, narratives were evaluated for their role in transmitting generational wisdom and reinforcing societal values, especially in terms of how they shape youth perspectives and cultural continuity[7]. By triangulating narrative analysis with cultural philosophy, the study offers a reflective lens on how Eastern tales function as timeless educational tools and moral frameworks. This method enabled the formulation of meaningful conclusions regarding the enduring pedagogical role of folklore in sustaining ethical development and societal harmony[8].

Results and Discussion

Any being detached from its roots cannot develop! It will wither, become firewood, and disappear. We can see that this educational, scientific expression applies to every person and to society as a whole[9]. Throughout the history of world literature, scientific-spiritual and socio-political issues have been reflected and illuminated in the works of scholars, writers, and poets throughout human history. Since the emergence of humanity, people have strived to build a perfect society. So, the question arises: why couldn't people build such a perfect society for many centuries? Of course, among the many reasons for this are issues such as not knowing how to nourish oneself from one's own roots, not studying one's own history well, and not drawing correct conclusions. Additionally, historical errors were often caused by the fact that the older generation and the younger generation do not always understand each other well, or do not want to understand each other[10].

This issue is present in the history and life of all peoples around the world[11]. These matters have

been depicted in oral folk traditions and written literature so that young people do not become detached from their roots and can learn from them.

For example, Chinese verbal art is characterized by its inclusion of topics related to our subject, such as the individual, family, everyday life, and social realities. It presents interesting and artistic accounts of how family members should conduct themselves in daily life, what roles they should play, and how attention should be given to raising children. Young people are taught that it is possible to achieve goals through patience[12].

One of the ancient Chinese legends is called "If you keep grinding, even a hammer can become a needle." This legend tells the story of an old woman and her words that greatly influenced the life and character of Li Bai, the great poet of the Tang Dynasty. One day, young Li Bai, who wasn't particularly fond of studying, was playing around when he saw an old woman rubbing a hammer against a stone[13]. Surprised, he asked, "Grandma, what are you doing?" The old woman replied that she was trying to make a needle by rubbing the hammer against the stone. Li Bai, in disbelief, asked, "Is it possible to turn such a large piece of iron into a needle?" Then he heard the answer that would impact his life. The old woman said to him, "Only through patience and hard work can thick iron become a needle, of course," and continued rubbing the iron against the stone. This incident inspired Li Bai to become determined and to work with patience, eventually leading him to become a great poet.

The event, theme, and idea mentioned in the story are not unfamiliar to our people either. Our people have long emphasized raising their children to be resilient and patient. In such instances, there are numerous encouraging proverbs and sayings. Proverbs like "If you are patient, unripe fruit will turn into halva" or instructive thoughts such as "digging a well with a needle," which encourage patience in learning, serve as evidence of our perspective[14].

We can cite another Chinese legend as an example. This legend is called "Turning back halfway." It tells the story of a man named Le Yangzi, who lived on the banks of the Yellow River, and his wise and virtuous wife. One day, Le Yangzi found a piece of gold on the road and gave it to his wife. His wise wife, however, politely advised him: "I've heard that a moral person should not drink from a spring of theft; a person with a clear conscience will not accept demeaning charity. How, then, can one find and appropriate others' lost belongings?" she said. Upon hearing this, Le Yangzi, feeling ashamed, returned and put his find back in its place[15].

We find a similar educational pattern in the values of our people. There are many hadiths and stories about halal and haram food...

Le Yangzi went abroad to study. After studying for a year, he surpassed his peers. However, a year later, he dropped out of school and returned to his family. His wise wife advised him on the right path. As an example, she showed him the silk she was weaving, explaining that this silk was first a silkworm, from which thread was made, and from the thread, silk fabric was obtained. From this fabric, a beautiful dress could be sewn. She said that if the thread or fabric were cut abruptly with scissors, no dress could be made. She also told him that if one abandons knowledge halfway, they cannot become anyone of significance. After this, Le Yangzi returned to his studies, delving deep into knowledge. As a result, he gained the king's attention with his wisdom and potential and was accepted into the palace service.

Here, it is appropriate to quote the phrase "behind every great man there is a great woman." Among our people's proverbs, the saying "It's the wife who makes a man a man, and it's the wife who brings him down to earth" is impressive in its profound meaning. Therefore, if the environment in every family is healthy, with a striving for good and vitality, it yields an important positive result in the formation of personality. Such a healthy environment, as mentioned above, is built on knowledge, ancestral experience, and noble goals.

One of the Chinese folk tales is called "The Old Horse Knows the Way." It tells of an incident during the Chun-qiu (Spring and Autumn) period when the Emperor of Qi, returning victorious from one of his military campaigns, got lost halfway. Even after wandering through the valley for several days, they couldn't find a way out of the mountains. Panic spread within the army. At one point, one of the officials named Guan Zhong said he had found a solution. The solution was to use an old horse's wisdom to find the way, as horses remember and recognize the paths they have traveled. Following this advice, the old horse led the people out of harm's way. Overjoyed, the people then came to believe that "an old horse knows the way."

The events mentioned in this story are familiar to us. Our people have proverbs like "What the elderly know, even a fairy doesn't know" and "A house with an elder has a fairy," and as the great king and poet Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur said, "What the youth don't see looking in a mirror, the elderly see looking at a brick" - these are very instructive sayings. We also have ancient tales and legends related to this theme. For example: One king issued a decree to expel all elderly people from the country. Everyone had to take their elderly parents to the desert. A young man also took his father to the desert. As the young man was turning back, his father suddenly laughed. The son asked, "Why are you laughing? I'm leaving you in this desolate desert. Don't you know that certain death awaits you?" The father replied, "Once, I too left my father in this very place." Moved by his father's words, the son decided to take his father back home, come what may. He began to care for his father in secret, hidden from people's eyes. As fate would have it, several trials befell the king of the country. For instance, the princess of a neighboring country, whom he fancied, set several conditions. One of the conditions was to distinguish between two identical horses. No one could tell which was the mother and which was the offspring. The young man secretly consulted his father about this matter. The father advised that both horses should be fed equally. Whichever horse stands aside and waits would be the mother, as she would let her offspring eat first. The mother horse waits for her foal to be full before eating herself. When this experiment was carried out, the father's wisdom proved correct, and the king was deemed to have fulfilled the condition. The king persistently questioned the young man about how he knew this solution. The reluctant son admitted he learned it from his father. Impressed by this, the king revoked his decree and ordered that the elderly be treated with respect and honor.

Thus, it is emphasized that in ancient China, as in other Eastern countries, one should rely on the knowledge and experience of the elderly and draw conclusions from their teachings.

To develop in this land and build a prosperous society, attention to this land, our history, our parents, our roots, and the values of our people is very important. As we have seen, the approach to this issue is the same among different peoples - patience, knowledge, and not losing touch with one's roots are necessary. There is a commonality in the social realities of our Eastern peoples; the approach to problems and solutions is the same - one must patiently strive for a noble goal, preserve values, and not lose touch with one's roots. Only with these qualities can a good society be formed.

Conclusion

The analysis of Eastern folk tales and proverbs reveals a deeply rooted philosophy of life that emphasizes patience, moral integrity, respect for elders, and fidelity to one's cultural heritage. The stories examined—from the perseverance of Li Bai to the wisdom of aged advisors and the moral clarity of figures like Le Yangzi—demonstrate that these narratives are not mere folklore but are pedagogical instruments transmitting time-tested human values. By drawing parallels between ancient Chinese tales and Uzbek oral traditions, the article illustrates a shared Eastern worldview in which the collective memory, intergenerational respect, and ethical conduct form the basis of societal stability and individual development. Such stories do more than entertain; they cultivate a sense of rootedness in young minds and offer guidance for confronting modern challenges with timeless wisdom. The moral conveyed is that true social progress is not built on the abandonment of tradition,

but on its intelligent preservation and application. As the experiences of Eastern societies show, detachment from one's roots leads to cultural and moral erosion, while honoring them ensures a resilient, ethically guided society. This conclusion advocates for the integration of folklore-based values into modern educational and cultural systems as a means to nurture a generation that is both forward-looking and grounded in the moral consciousness of its ancestry. Thus, Eastern tales serve as philosophical beacons, lighting the path toward a meaningful, community-centered, and value-driven life.

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