



ANIMAL IMAGES IN UZBEK AND KOREAN FOLKLORE

Sultonova Zahro Olimjon qizi

Tashkent Kimyo International University, Samarkand Branch

Faculty of Foreign Languages

Korean Philology Department

Abstract: *This article examines the role and symbolic significance of animal images in Uzbek and Korean folklore. Animals have occupied an important place in the oral traditions of both nations, reflecting their cultural values, beliefs, moral principles, and perceptions of the natural world. In Uzbek folklore, animals frequently appear in fairy tales, legends, proverbs, and fables as representations of wisdom, courage, cunning, loyalty, and justice. Similarly, Korean folklore uses animal characters to express traditional beliefs, social relationships, and ethical values. The tiger, fox, rabbit, and dragon are among the most recognizable animal figures in Korean traditional narratives, while the wolf, fox, lion, horse, and other animals appear in various forms in Uzbek oral literature. Through a comparative analysis, this article identifies similarities and differences in the symbolic meanings of animal characters in the folklore of the two nations. It also highlights the importance of preserving animal symbolism as an essential component of national cultural heritage.*

Keywords: *Uzbek folklore, Korean folklore, animal symbolism, oral literature, fairy tales, folk beliefs, cultural heritage, comparative analysis, traditional narratives, national identity.*

Folk oral literature is one of the most important forms of cultural expression through which nations preserve their historical experiences, traditional beliefs, moral values, and collective memory. Fairy tales, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, and fables provide valuable information about how people understand the world around them. Among the various characters found in folklore, animals occupy a particularly



significant position. They are not merely elements of the natural environment but also symbolic figures that represent human characteristics, social relationships, and philosophical ideas. Both Uzbek and Korean folklore contain numerous animal characters that reflect the historical and cultural experiences of their respective societies. Despite differences in geography, historical development, and religious traditions, the two cultures share certain literary features. In both traditions, animals can speak, think, make decisions, and interact with human beings. Through these characters, storytellers communicate lessons about honesty, wisdom, kindness, responsibility, and the consequences of immoral behavior. The comparative study of animal images in Uzbek and Korean folklore is therefore important for understanding the similarities and differences between the two cultural traditions. It also demonstrates how universal human experiences are expressed through culturally specific symbols and narratives [1].

Uzbek folklore has a rich and diverse tradition of representing animals in fairy tales, fables, proverbs, and other forms of oral literature. Animal characters frequently possess human qualities and participate in situations that reflect everyday life, social relationships, and moral conflicts. The fox is commonly associated with cunning, cleverness, and the ability to overcome difficulties through intelligence. In animal tales, the fox often succeeds through persuasive speech and strategic thinking. However, its behavior may also illustrate the negative consequences of excessive cunning, dishonesty, and manipulation. Consequently, the fox can represent both intelligence and moral ambiguity, depending on the context of the narrative. The wolf is another important animal character in Uzbek oral traditions. It may symbolize strength, danger, aggression, or the struggle for survival. In some stories, the wolf functions as an antagonist whose actions create difficulties for other characters. Such representations help explain the importance of caution, cooperation, and the ability to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy individuals [2].

The lion is traditionally associated with courage, strength, dignity, and authority. Its image frequently appears in expressions and narratives that emphasize



bravery and leadership. The horse also has a significant place in the cultural imagination of the Uzbek people. Given the historical importance of horses in transportation, agriculture, warfare, and nomadic traditions across Central Asia, the horse often represents loyalty, endurance, freedom, and companionship. Birds also appear in Uzbek folklore as symbols of beauty, freedom, hope, and communication between different worlds. Depending on the story, they may help heroes, deliver important messages, or guide characters toward their goals. Animal characters are particularly important in Uzbek fairy tales because they allow storytellers to criticize negative human behavior indirectly. Greed, arrogance, laziness, dishonesty, and injustice can be represented through the actions of animals. At the same time, helpful and intelligent characters demonstrate the value of cooperation, patience, and moral responsibility [3].

Uzbek proverbs containing animal names further illustrate the relationship between traditional wisdom and the natural environment. Such expressions often use familiar animal behaviors to communicate practical lessons about human conduct. Their concise structure makes them easy to remember and transmit from one generation to another. Korean folklore also contains a wide variety of animal characters that reflect traditional beliefs, social values, and cultural interpretations of the natural world. Animals appear in myths, fairy tales, legends, fables, and proverbs, frequently serving as symbols of particular virtues, weaknesses, or supernatural powers. The tiger is one of the most recognizable animals in Korean folklore. Historically, tigers occupied an important place in the Korean imagination because of their presence in the country's mountainous landscapes and their influence on traditional beliefs. The tiger can symbolize strength, authority, courage, and danger. However, Korean folktales sometimes portray tigers as foolish, easily deceived, or comically vulnerable to human intelligence [4].

This combination of power and vulnerability gives the tiger a distinctive role in Korean storytelling. A physically powerful tiger may be defeated by a smaller animal or an ordinary person who demonstrates superior intelligence. Such narratives



emphasize that physical strength alone does not guarantee success and that wisdom can overcome apparently greater power. The fox is another significant figure in Korean traditional narratives. One well-known supernatural figure is the gumiho, a mythical nine-tailed fox capable of transforming into a human being. The gumiho appears in various forms across Korean legends and modern adaptations. Depending on the narrative, it may be portrayed as mysterious, dangerous, deceptive, or emotionally complex. This figure reflects traditional concerns about appearances, trust, temptation, and the boundaries between the human and supernatural worlds. The rabbit also occupies an important place in Korean folklore. In traditional stories, rabbits are frequently associated with cleverness, resourcefulness, and the ability to escape dangerous situations through intelligence. The well-known tale of the rabbit and the sea king illustrates how a seemingly weak character can overcome a powerful opponent through quick thinking and persuasive speech. Dragons are another important element of Korean mythology. Unlike some animal characters that primarily represent ordinary human weaknesses, dragons often possess supernatural powers and are associated with water, rain, protection, and prosperity. Their symbolic significance is connected with traditional cosmological beliefs and the importance of water in agricultural society [5].

Birds, particularly the magpie, also feature in Korean cultural traditions. The magpie is commonly associated with good news and favorable events. Its image appears in traditional art and popular cultural expressions, demonstrating how animals can become symbols of positive expectations and social communication. Korean animal tales frequently combine humor, supernatural elements, and moral instruction. Through the interactions of animals, storytellers explore social hierarchy, human foolishness, deception, kindness, and the importance of intelligence in overcoming adversity.

Conclusion

Animal images constitute an important element of Uzbek and Korean folk oral literature. In both cultures, animals serve as symbolic characters through which



people express moral principles, cultural beliefs, social experiences, and interpretations of the natural world. The fox, wolf, lion, and horse in Uzbek folklore, together with the tiger, fox, rabbit, and dragon in Korean folklore, demonstrate the diversity of animal symbolism in traditional narratives. The comparative analysis shows that both traditions emphasize intelligence, courage, honesty, and moral responsibility. At the same time, differences in the symbolic prominence of particular animals reflect the historical, geographical, and cultural experiences of the Uzbek and Korean peoples. The study of animal imagery therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of national identity and intercultural relationships. It demonstrates that folklore is not simply a collection of entertaining stories but also an important means of preserving collective memory, transmitting ethical values, and maintaining cultural continuity. Further research into Uzbek and Korean animal tales, proverbs, and legends could provide a more detailed understanding of the development of animal symbolism and its role in contemporary literature and education. Preserving these traditions is essential for ensuring that the cultural knowledge of previous generations remains meaningful to future generations.

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