

Differences Between Oriental and Occidental Foklore Texts in Terms of Using Zoonyms

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Abstract: Zoonymy, the practice of naming and attributing symbolic meanings to animals, has been a vital aspect of human culture for millennia. In folklore texts, zoonyms, which mean animal names, play a multifaceted role, embodying moral lessons, cultural values, and mythical archetypes. These names are more than mere identifiers; they often symbolize traits, convey allegories, and connect human experiences with the natural world. This article explores how zoonyms are employed in folklore texts and their cultural, symbolic, and literary significance and compares differences between eastern and western foklore texts in terms of using zoonyms.

Keywords: Zoonym, cultural values, sybols, linguistics, folklore, oriental folklore, metaphors, zoonymic symbolism.

Introduction: Zoonymy in folklore texts serves as a bridge between the human and natural worlds, imbuing stories with cultural, moral, and symbolic depth. Through the use of animal names, these texts encapsulate universal truths while reflecting the unique values of individual cultures. As a literary device, zoonymy not only enriches the narrative but also ensures its enduring relevance in both traditional and modern contexts. Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach in *Mythologiques* examines how animal symbols function in myths and storytelling to resolve cultural oppositions (e.g., nature vs. culture, life vs. death).

2. Linguistic Approaches

Etymology and Semantics: Linguists analyze the origins and evolution of animal names in folklore, revealing how they encode cultural knowledge.

Cross-Language Comparisons: Researchers compare the zoonymic lexicon in different languages to identify common archetypes and cultural nuances. For example, the fox as a symbol of cunning appears in diverse linguistic traditions, but with nuanced connotations depending on the region.

3. Cultural Studies and Mythology

Comparative Mythology: Scholars like Joseph Campbell

and Mircea Eliade examine the recurrence of specific zoonyms in global mythologies and their archetypal roles in folklore.

Symbolic Functions: Scholars like Roland Barthes explore the semiotic systems of animal names in folklore. Zoonymic symbolism is analyzed as part of larger cultural sign systems that encode moral lessons or spiritual beliefs.

Key Researchers and Works

Claude Lévi-Strauss: Analysis of myths and animal symbolism in structural anthropology.

Joseph Campbell: Archetypes in global mythology and their recurring motifs

METHOD

The use of zoonyms (animal names) in Eastern and Western folklore reflects distinct cultural worldviews, spiritual beliefs, and symbolic frameworks. Below is a comparative analysis of how zoonyms are utilized in these two cultural spheres:

1. Symbolic Representations

Eastern Folklore:

Animals often embody spiritual and cosmic elements, representing harmony, balance, and transformation.

For instance:

The dragon in Chinese folklore is a revered symbol of power, wisdom, and good fortune, associated with emperors and cosmic forces.

The crane represents longevity and immortality in Japanese and Korean folklore.

The tiger, seen in Chinese and Indian traditions, symbolizes strength, courage, and protection against evil spirits.

Eastern zoonyms often carry auspicious or spiritual meanings rooted in Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu philosophies.

Western Folklore:

Animals frequently symbolize moral qualities, human vices, or virtues, often used to teach lessons.

For instance:

The lion is a universal emblem of bravery and royalty in European tales (e.g., the "lionheart").

The fox often represents cunning and deceit in Aesop's fables and medieval allegories.

The wolf, commonly seen in European tales like "Little Red Riding Hood," is a symbol of danger or predation, often portrayed as a villain.

2. Religious and Mythological Contexts

Eastern Folklore:

Animals are often sacred or divine beings linked to religious traditions:

In Hinduism, the cow is venerated as a sacred animal and symbol of abundance.

The monkey, as seen in the Ramayana (Hanuman) and Journey to the West (Sun Wukong), is a heroic figure with supernatural powers.

The snake in Indian mythology is both revered (as a protector in Naga lore) and feared (as a symbol of divine retribution).

Eastern folklore frequently merges animals with mythological entities (e.g., naga, qilin) to convey a fusion of human and cosmic concerns.

Western Folklore:

Animals are often depicted as earthly beings representing moral or religious allegories.

The snake in Christian tradition is a symbol of temptation and evil (e.g., the serpent in the Garden of Eden).

The dove symbolizes peace and divine grace in biblical stories.

The unicorn, while mythical, is linked to purity and chastity in medieval European folklore, often used in Christian iconography.

Unlike Eastern traditions, animals are less commonly deified in Western folklore.

3. Interaction with Nature

Eastern Folklore:

Eastern texts often emphasize coexistence and harmony with nature, portraying animals as integral to the natural and spiritual order.

The koi fish in Chinese and Japanese folklore symbolizes perseverance and strength, reflecting the natural cycle of life.

Folklore frequently highlights the interconnectedness of humans and animals, with animals aiding humans in achieving enlightenment or spiritual goals.

Folktales such as The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter or The Story of the White Snake depict animals as wise, magical beings capable of deep relationships with humans.

Western Folklore:

Western stories often depict animals as adversaries, resources, or allegorical tools for human-centered narratives.

Animals like wolves and bears are frequently cast as antagonists or threats (e.g., "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf").

While some tales show friendship between humans and animals (e.g., The Bremen Town Musicians), the focus often remains on human dominance over nature.

The portrayal of animals is more pragmatic and moralistic, reflecting historical interactions where humans sought to tame or control the natural world.

4. Character Roles

Eastern Folklore:

Animals often serve as spiritual guides, protectors, or embodiments of wisdom:

In Journey to the West, the monkey king Sun Wukong is both a trickster and a hero with divine attributes.

Tengu (bird-like creatures) in Japanese folklore are often guardians of forests and mountains.

Eastern folklore frequently features shape-shifting animals (e.g., fox spirits like the kitsune in Japan and huli jing in China), emphasizing fluid boundaries between animal and human realms.

Western Folklore:

Animals often appear as moral exemplars or adversaries:

Aesop's fables use animals like the fox, tortoise, and hare to teach ethical lessons, where their roles are fixed and symbolic.

Predatory animals like wolves and serpents often serve as cautionary figures, warning against danger and moral failing.

Western folklore rarely features animals with transformative or magical qualities, maintaining a clear boundary between human and animal realms.

5. Narrative Functions

Eastern Folklore:

Zoonyms often advance narratives of balance, transformation, and spiritual growth.

For example, the carp transforming into a dragon in Chinese folklore symbolizes perseverance leading to great achievement.

Many tales use animal names to underline cyclical and harmonious life themes, as in the Chinese zodiac, where each animal represents specific traits and years.

Animals are depicted as multidimensional characters, often blending moral and spiritual qualities.

Western Folklore:

Zoonyms often serve as straightforward moral tools, with animals depicted as embodying a single dominant trait.

Stories like The Ant and the Grasshopper or The Tortoise and the Hare emphasize binary oppositions, such as diligence vs. laziness or speed vs. patience.

Animals are often used as tools to deliver a clear, didactic message rather than exploring complex relationships with humans or nature.

CONCLUSION

The primary differences in the use of zoonyms between Eastern and Western folklore reflect their broader cultural and philosophical perspectives. Eastern traditions often emphasize interconnectedness, spirituality, and the fluidity between human and animal worlds, while Western folklore tends to focus on moral lessons, human dominance, and clear distinctions between species. These differences provide rich insights into the unique ways societies perceive and narrate their relationships with the animal world.

Future directions are given below

Intersection with Environmental Studies: Exploring how modern ecological challenges influence zoonymic representations in folklore.

AI and Folklore: Using artificial intelligence to analyze zoonymic patterns in large datasets of global folklore texts.

Cultural Preservation: Documenting endangered oral traditions involving zoonyms to preserve cultural heritage.

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