

Folklore and History: The Embodiment of Historical Memory in Uzbek Folk Art

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Abstract: This article examines the dialectical relationship between folklore and history in Uzbek culture, positioning oral traditions as vessels of historical memory. Through case studies of the UNESCO-recognized festivals "Boysun Bahori," "Bakhshichilik," and "Lazgi," the study demonstrates how folklore embodies historical consciousness and transmits national identity across generations.

Methodologically, it analyzes folklore as: A source for reconstructing historical worldviews, A tool for performative historical reconstruction (e.g., Azim Azizov's theatrical adaptations), A framework for cultural resilience in digitized contexts. Findings reveal that folklore's integration into digital media, educational curricula, and cultural diplomacy strategies fortifies "cultural immunity" among youth amid globalization. The research asserts that safeguarding living folklore is essential for decolonizing historical narratives and sustaining Uzbek cultural ontology.

Keywords: Historical memory, Folklore revitalization, Cultural heritage diplomacy, Dastan epic tradition, Performative reconstruction, Intangible cultural heritage, Cultural immunity, Oral historiography, Digital folklore preservation, Uzbek folk festivals.

Introduction: The restoration of national memory and historical consciousness is not only the sacred duty of historians but of every intellectual. "A nation unaware of its history loses its path" emphasized I.A. Karimov, the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan [1].

In today's era of globalization, aesthetic and spiritual comprehension of history is essential to preserving national identity. Folklore art-an oral creative heritage preserving the deepest layers of people's memory and mentality-is a unique resource in this process.

In our country, these ideas are consistently pursued. The policy led by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh.M.Mirziyoyev, designates the preservation of oral folk heritage, its transmission to younger generations, and its global promotion as a key priority [2]. Concrete measures in this regard are codified in the May 26, 2022 decree "On Measures to Safeguard and Develop Intangible Cultural Heritage" [3]. Against this political and cultural backdrop, folklore art holds exceptional importance in studying the rich historical-cultural heritage of the Uzbek people. It is

recognized not only as a form of oral creativity but as an ancient cultural phenomenon embodying aesthetic, spiritual, mental, and even political dimensions of historical science.

This article focuses on the methodological intersections of folklore art and historical science, illustrating their synergy through practical festival examples. It also examines folklore as a vital factor in modern cultural diplomacy and youth education.

Folklore is the oral creativity of the people. Formed since ancient times based on lifestyles, worldviews, traditions, and historical memory, it has been transmitted orally across generations [4]. This includes dastans (epic poems), fairy tales, legends, songs, dances, and folk games. The roots of Uzbek folklore trace back to Zoroastrianism and the civilizations of Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khorezm.

Cities, heroes, and rituals depicted in legends align with historical facts preserved in popular memory. The notion that "No genre, no work can be outside the principles of history" confirms the connection between

dastans/oral creativity and historical truths [5].

Thus, folklore's historicity stems not from its status as an artwork but from its role as a living form of thought preserved in popular consciousness. In other words, folklore is the oral "archive" of historical thought.

Boysun Oasis has been a center of bakhshichilik (epic storytelling), dastan performance, craftsmanship, and folk theater since antiquity. Its recognition by UNESCO and the hosting of international festivals there are high tributes to our historical culture [6].

The first "Boysun Bahori" festival (2019) hosted guests from 30+ countries and 200+ artists [7]. Janda fabrics, dastan performers, and folk dances vividly embodied history.

The biennial "Bakhshichilik" festival in Termiz popularizes national epic thought and historical consciousness. Dastans like "Alpomish", "Gorogli" and "Rustamxon" are staged theatrically.

"Boysun Bahori" is a festival of cultural landscapes and traditions, while "Bakhshichilik" is a celebration of oral epic history and poetic memory. Both events represent the aesthetic revival of popular memory on stage, reflecting diverse historical-folkloric facets.

"Lazgi"-a symbolic-philosophical dance of ancient Khorezm-is a cultural expression deeply rooted in the people's spiritual world. Inscribed by UNESCO (2019) as intangible cultural heritage, the biennial International Lazgi Festival in Urgench hosts representatives from 30+ nations [8].

Every movement in Lazgi-finger tremors, palm openings, body rotations-embodies ancient philosophical worldviews. The dance expresses esoteric concepts like "the soul enters the body, energy circulates" using symbols of earth, water, sun, freedom, and love to convey human-nature harmony.

In my view, Lazgi is not merely an expression of beauty but a living embodiment of historical worldview and aesthetic thought. This qualifies it as a form of visual-aesthetic expression in historical science.

European researchers acknowledge: "Uzbek folk music [...] teaches young people about their own nationality and culture and strengthens their cultural identification." [9]

Artist Azim Azizov's contributions to synthesizing folklore with stage art are unparalleled. Through ensembles like "Bayot", "Chaman" and "Umid" he brought oral creativity to the stage via dastans, dances, and maqom. His work has been showcased in China, Turkey, Russia, and Germany, earning international acclaim.

In Azizov's work, folklore is not mere performance but

a theatrical revitalization of historical images and events. This represents a practical application of the cultural reconstruction method in historical science.

This performative approach, I argue, organically aligns with the concept of "performative historical reconstruction" in historiography. Through it, folklore becomes a tool to viscerally, imaginatively, and spiritually revive the past in the audience's consciousness.

Through folklore, youth connect with their history and values, finding identity through bakhshis, dastan performers, dancers, and singers. Today, 100+ folk dastans and nearly 1000 songs have been documented as living sources of national memory [10].

In the digital era, folklore elements-dastans, dances, legends, traditions-are disseminated via audio, video, stage, and virtual formats. This enables youth to interactively comprehend their history, aesthetic thought, and national identity.

International research concludes: "Folklore, when integrated into digital content, becomes a tool for educating and shaping cultural resilience among digital-native youth." [11]

I believe this process transforms folklore into not only a cultural but also a spiritual and educational instrument. Particularly amid strengthening foreign cultural influences in global information flows, it is crucial for building cultural immunity and anchoring youth to their national roots.

"Folklore is the most ancient and long-standing branch of artistic speech developed in the process of labor and human consciousness." [9]

CONCLUSION

Folklore art is not merely an echo of historical memory but its living form in modern consciousness. It enables deep understanding of a people's psychology, ancient worldview, social engagement, and cultural development. Hence, studying, analyzing, and reinterpreting folklore sources within new scholarly contexts is an urgent task for modern historical methodology [5].

Evidence confirms that international festivals like "Boysun Bahori", "Bakhshichilik" and "Lazgi" revitalize not only folklore aesthetics but also processes of historical thought, national identity, and cultural integration. Through them, national traditions, oral dastans, stage art, and dance elements serve as aesthetic-pedagogical tools for shaping historical consciousness [6][8].

Preserving and developing folklore art today is a tribute not only to culture but to popular memory and national identity. Folklore offers avenues for self-discovery,

sustaining spiritual heritage, and strengthening historical thinking among youth. This art form is a multifaceted resource directly linked to historiography, ethnology, psychology, cultural studies, and sociology [4].

These festivals also play a critical role in elevating youth spirituality and stabilizing national identity in our digitized world. Through the internet, social media, and multimedia technologies, “Lazgi” and “Bakhshichilik” reach millions, increasing interest in ancient culture and forming cultural immunity in the digital generation [10][11].

Amid powerful foreign cultural currents, these folklore festivals educate youth based on the principle of “living in an open world without losing oneself.” Popularizing folklore and exporting it as digital content is becoming Uzbek art’s modern diplomatic and educational strategy.

Therefore, deeply studying folklore as a tool for shaping historical consciousness, integrating it into curricula, researching it scientifically, and presenting it through festivals is a relevant and promising direction for contemporary historical science.

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