

Philosophy of Life and Ethics of Being Human In Folk Tales of the Pa then People in Quang Binh District, Ha Giang Province



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SUMMARY: In the large family of Vietnamese ethnic groups, the Pa Then people are one of the ethnic minority groups with a very small population (less than 1,000 people), mainly living in Ha Giang province. Although their number is not large, the Pa Then people still preserve their unique cultural features, especially their treasure trove of folk tales. These are works containing profound philosophical values about life and human morality, but are not widely known. This article introduces the values of life in the folk tales of the Pa Then people. Through research, statistics and analysis of both the content and art of the stories, the group of authors found that these folk tales truly reflect the material and spiritual life of the Pa Then people, especially the concepts about the philosophy of life and human morality. However, in the trend of integration and cultural exchange today, the folk tales of the Pa Then people, as well as the folklore of other ethnic groups, are facing the risk of being lost and distorted. Therefore, the research and introduction of the folk tales of the Pa Then people is necessary to preserve and promote their cultural values in the current multicultural environment.

KEYWORDS: Pa Then folk tales, philosophy of life, human ethics, life values, national culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, where each community possesses folk tales that reflect its cultural values, beliefs and history. These tales not only educate about morality and personality but also preserve cultural identity and connect generations. However, in the context of modernization, many folk tales, especially those of ethnic minorities, are facing the risk of being lost. Therefore, researching and preserving them is extremely important.

Our Party and State have consistently affirmed that culture, including the culture of ethnic minorities, is an important factor and a driving force for development because: "Culture... is the soul of the Nation, expressing the identity of the Nation. As long as culture exists, the Nation exists" (4). Resolution of the 5th Central Conference, Session VIII "On building and developing an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity" also determined that " Culture is the spiritual foundation of society, both the goal and the driving force for socio-economic development; Vietnamese culture is a unified and diverse culture in the community of Vietnamese ethnic groups " (5). Resolution of the 9th Central Conference, Session XI "On building and developing Vietnamese culture and people to meet the requirements of sustainable national development" (6) continues to emphasize Building a comprehensively developed Vietnamese culture and people, aiming at truth - goodness - beauty, imbued with national spirit, humanity, democracy and science. Culture truly becomes a solid spiritual foundation of society, an important endogenous strength ensuring sustainable development and firmly protecting the Fatherland for the goal of a rich people, strong country, democracy, fairness and civilization; building an advanced Vietnamese culture, imbued with national identity, unified in the diversity of the Vietnamese ethnic community, with national, humanistic, democratic and scientific characteristics. The Resolution also emphasizes the task of preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, especially languages, writings, costumes and traditional festivals; proactively seizing development opportunities, overcoming challenges to preserve and perfect the national cultural identity.

The Pa Then ethnic group is a particularly small ethnic group but has unique folk tales that reflect the knowledge, values and life philosophy of the community (1). Although there have been some studies documenting their folk tales, the number is still small, and the core values of each story have not been exploited. In the era of cultural exchange, learning and protecting these stories not only helps preserve cultural heritage but also creates a bridge between the past and the future, helping the younger generation better understand the origin and values of the nation.

2. RESEARCH RESULTS

2.1. Philosophy of life

One is the law of cause and effect. We can see that bad actions will inevitably lead to bad consequences in the stories *The Monkey and the Chicken Thigh Mushroom*, *The Stepmother and Her Stepchild*, *The Legend of the False Dragon - The Legend of the North Star*. Parents abandoned their children and when they realized their mistakes, it was too late to correct them. The two children became monkeys, living in the wild forest, with no memory of their parents. The parents' hasty actions led to irreversible consequences. This is a lesson in responsibility and consideration before making decisions in life. "When the rice season was ripe, the parents had a bumper crop. Regretting having abandoned their children, they prepared a tray of rice with white sticky rice and boiled chicken and brought it to the place where they had left the two children. They called out: "Children, come back and eat with your parents! We have brought you sticky rice and chicken!" However, the two children were nowhere to be seen. Finally, the two monkeys jumped down from the tree and said that they had forgotten everything about humans and did not need to come back. The consequences of abandoning children are irreversible when the mistake is realized. The two children have lived too long in the forest and become a part of nature, unable to return to their old lives. This is a lesson about responsibility and consideration before making important decisions in *The Legend of the Monkey and the Oyster Mushroom*. In the story *The Appearance of the Shaman*, after suffering the consequences, the shaman said: "There are benefits and harms, but this time I have harmed myself! From now on, my descendants should not foolishly learn how to use poison to harm others, only learn how to save others!" This saying represents a philosophy of life that one should not use cruel means even if it may bring temporary benefits. Using poison to seek revenge or harm others will ultimately harm oneself. This philosophy emphasizes the need to live honestly, avoid harming others so as not to suffer painful consequences. In life, good deeds will always bring better results.

Second, fairness and equality. In the stories *The Stepmother and Her Stepchildren*, *The Origin of Eight Pa Then Ethnic Clans*, *The Story of the Oc Fruit*, readers can recognize some messages such as: honesty and filial piety will be rewarded, a fair and unbiased society, ... Through the story of *the Stepmother and her Stepchild*, readers are taught the philosophy of fairness in the family and society. The husband's stepdaughter, although treated badly, always remained honest and filial, and was eventually rewarded with justice from the tiger god, while the stepmother, because of her greed and injustice, suffered the consequences she deserved. "Hearing this, the tiger god realized that this was a good girl who loved everyone around her. The tiger felt pity, not only did not harm the girl but also gave her a lot of gold and silver and brought her back home." Her fair actions and honesty were rewarded, proving that in life, fairness and love will always be rewarded, while injustice and cruelty will lead to painful consequences. In the story *The Origin of Eight Clans of the Pà Thên Ethnic Group* There is a general rule of the clans such as: "A cup and a bowl touching each other must not touch the bowl; a pot and a bowl touching each other must not touch the pot". This is a metaphor for the fact that in a family or clan, each member has their own role and position, and must not infringe on each other's rights and freedom. The morality of being human in this story encourages respect in family and social relationships.

Third, the spirit of self-reliance, never giving up. Intelligence and perseverance help people overcome difficulties. Do not be discouraged when facing challenges, determined to go to the end. These things are clearly seen in some stories such as: *The origin of the weaving profession*, *The story of the monster*, *The image of the dog on the Pa Then people's costumes*. In the story *The origin of the weaving profession*, when the girl discovered that the Witch wanted to kill her, instead of giving up or accepting defeat, she used tricks to protect her life. The girl pretended to sleep, changed sleeping places with the Witch's daughter and deceived her. When the Witch chased after her, the girl not only ran away but also knew how to use important objects such as the magic wand to stop her: "The girl ran to another mountain, she dropped one leg of the wand, the Witch saw it and immediately picked up the wand, returned home to put it away and continued on her way." The girl's actions showed creativity and intelligence when faced with a dangerous situation. Instead of facing death helplessly, she took advantage of every opportunity and trick to escape danger and protect herself.

Fourth, optimism. Optimism helps connect people, enriching life. We should not let external factors influence us too much, gossip and judgment can destroy happiness. We see this through the stories: *The Orphan and the King's Daughter*, *The Snail Story*. Gossip is a testament to not letting external judgments, whether right or wrong, affect our decisions and relationships. It was these criticisms that made the main character doubt his wife and destroy family happiness. "But in the village there were mean people who criticized him: This guy is so dirty, he got a beautiful wife but his wife is not good enough. His wife uses saliva as salt, his wife is so ugly. He heard the gossip and began to doubt. wife, chase wife away" in *The Snail Story*.

In addition, in the treasure trove of Pa Then folk tales, talent and magic are only valuable when serving the community. Without morality, talent is just a meaningless game. People are often tempted by external things, when they have power, people are easily drawn into arrogance and rivalry, ... in *The Shaman's Story*. Perseverance and avoiding excess in action, haste can lead to unfortunate consequences in the story of *The Lying King*,...

The philosophy of life in Pa Then folk tales has many similarities with fairy tales and myths from other cultures, expressing universal moral values of cause and effect, justice, self-reliance and optimism. First of all, the law of cause and effect is clearly shown in *The Legend of the Monkey and the King Oyster Mushroom*, when the parents lost their child forever because of a wrong decision. This is similar to Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*, where the indifference and indifference of society pushed the girl to

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her death, or *the Star Fruit Tree* of Vietnam, where the greedy brother was punished for his greed and selfishness. These stories all affirm that human actions, whether good or bad, have inevitable consequences, emphasizing the lesson of responsibility and consideration before making decisions.

In addition, the fairness and honesty in *The Stepmother and Her Stepson* reflect the idea that evil people will be punished, while good people will be rewarded. This is similar to *Tam Cam*, where Tam, despite being harmed, eventually finds happiness with the help of supernatural forces, or *Cinderella* in the West, where the girl, despite being treated unfairly by her stepfather, is eventually recognized and loved. However, the difference lies in the way Pa Then folk tales emphasize the fairness that comes from the natural world, such as the tiger god punishing the stepmother, instead of relying entirely on magical elements like in many Western fairy tales.

The spirit of self-reliance is also emphasized in *The Legend of the Weaving Craft*, when the girl uses her intelligence to protect herself, instead of waiting for help from outside. This is similar to Thach Sanh, when the brave man has to overcome challenges on his own without the support of any magic. Compared to Western folk tales such as *Jack and the Beanstalk*, where the main character relies on luck to change his fate, the Pa Then stories emphasize initiative and intelligence more.

Finally, the lesson of optimism in *The Snail Story*, with its warning against letting gossip affect one's happiness, can be compared to *The Frog Prince*, where the princess initially despises the frog but later recognizes his true worth. The difference, however, is that in the Pa Then folk tale, gossip not only shakes the character's faith but also leads to actual loss, emphasizing the serious consequences of gullibility and lack of determination in life.

In general, Pa Then folk tales have both the common characteristics of the world's treasure trove of folk tales and their own unique features in conveying life philosophies. While Western fairy tales often emphasize the magical element and the intervention of magic to resolve conflicts, Pa Then folk tales focus more on cause and effect and the real-life impacts of human actions. This reflects a practical and life-like mindset, where people must take responsibility for their own actions. At the same time, Pa Then folk tales also emphasize the connection between humans and nature, when many moral lessons are drawn from observing natural laws, such as the tiger god punishing the wicked or two children turning into monkeys because they lived too long in the forest. It is this balance between realistic and legendary elements that makes Pa Then folk tales so appealing, contributing to reflecting the unique worldview and cultural identity of this ethnic group.

2.2. Human ethics

First, the responsibility of parents towards their children. Parents cannot abandon their children even if they are poor. In *the story of the monkey and the oyster mushroom*, the parents decided to abandon their two young children because of poverty. However, this action goes against human morality and the responsibility of parents towards their children. Children are the flesh and blood of their parents, so no matter how difficult it is, parents cannot abandon their children. But in the story, "The couple made some sticky rice offerings and told their two children: "Children, your parents will take you to a rich place, where you will have enough food and warm clothes. But first, you must help your parents get water from a distant stream. Bring the water back, and your parents will wait for you in the hut to cook rice." However, they secretly drilled holes in the bottom of the bamboo tube so that their children could not bring water back, and finally abandoned them in the forest. Even though they live in poverty, parents should not deprive their children of their right to live, care for, and raise them. This is not only a cruel act but also goes against morality, causing them to suffer serious consequences. The story emphasizes that parents' love and responsibility for their children cannot be shaken by circumstances. When parents abandon their children, they not only lose their family ties but also create an irreparable wound. The consequences of this action do not stop at separation, but also the breakdown of family relationships, which should be a place of peace and protection. The story conveys a profound message that no matter how difficult the circumstances, parents must still fulfill their responsibilities, because love and sacrifice are the most important foundation of a family.

Second, honesty. Maintaining virtue even in difficult circumstances. We see in the story of *the Stepmother and her Stepchild*, the girl is always honest throughout the story, telling the truth to the Tiger God - a supernatural character. Her honesty is a symbol of noble human morality. "When the Tiger God asked: My child, what is this? The girl tremblingly replied: - This is my head; The Tiger raised his hand and asked: - My child, what is this? - This is my hand! - The girl replied, ...". When faced with the challenge of the tiger god, she did not lie to protect herself but told the truth, despite the dangerous situation. This action shows her integrity, not being swayed by fear or coercion, showing that honesty is not simply a virtue but also a manifestation of human character and dignity.

Honesty is a universal value in many fairy tales. In *The Stepmother and Her Stepchild*, the girl maintains her virtue and is rewarded by the tiger god, demonstrating the clear concept of cause and effect of the Pa Then people. Compared to *Tam Cam*, both characters are honest and kind, but Tam has to go through more challenges to receive justice. *Little Red Riding Hood* shows that honesty without vigilance can lead to bad consequences, in contrast to the rewards in the Pa Then story. *The shepherd boy* warns of the consequences of lying, emphasizing the value of honesty as a lesson. In general, Pa Then folk tales reflect the belief in fair rewards and punishments from nature, unlike Western tales that emphasize practical lessons about words and actions.

Third, tolerance and forgiveness. Forgiveness is important to help others change. We see this in the story of *The Elf Marries Pa Then, The Gambling Addict and His Persistent Wife*. In *The Elf Marries Pa Then*, although the Elf did wrong things, she

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eventually helped Pa Then's family reunite, demonstrating forgiveness and the ability of people to change. "The goblin also shed tears, watching the family reunite with relief". The goblin, despite having taken Pa Then as her husband and committing wrongdoings, eventually changed, leading his children back to reunite the family. This reflects the message of forgiveness and repentance in life, showing that people can change and seek redemption, regardless of their past. Or in *The Gambler and His Persistent Wife*, we see the wife's tolerance, "Seeing that he had changed, knew how to work hard and truly repent, she was moved to forgive". The wife's forgiveness is an important factor in helping her husband change. Even though he had made a big mistake, hurting his family, when she saw his repentance and effort to change, the wife was willing to forgive. Forgiveness here is not an easy thing, but an act that shows understanding and respect for people's ability to change. Thanks to his wife's forgiveness and encouragement, the husband has the opportunity to start over, rebuild his life and rebuild his family.

Fourth, sacrifice for the community. Putting the common interest above personal interest is reflected in the story *The Origin of the Eight Clans of the Pa Then People*, *The Image of the Dog on the Costume of the Pa Then People*. With the decision to sacrifice from an animal "The brave dog decided to help the Pa Then people by swimming across the vast ocean to search for the magical seed" in *The Image of the Dog on the Costume of the Pa Then People*, The dog's sacrifice and loyalty can be seen, as it did not hesitate to face difficulties and sacrifice itself to benefit the Pa Then community. The dog did not act only for its own benefit but for the survival of the entire community.

Fifth, the ability to correct mistakes. Mistakes can be corrected if people know how to repent and change is the message shown in some stories such as: *The Gambling Addict and His Persistent Wife*, *The Lying King*, *The Legend of the Pretending Star - The Origin of the North Star*. In the story *The Gambling Addict and His Persistent Wife*, after being taken care of by his wife, even though he no longer had the strength he had before, he still tried to work hard with jobs such as: raising chickens, raising ducks, cleaning the garden,... When he discovered that the person taking care of him was his wife, "He knelt down before her, tears streaming down his face, both regretful and emotional: - I was wrong. I have caused our mother and child to suffer too much. Please forgive me!" The husband is a testament to the ability to correct mistakes and change. He realized his mistakes when he looked back and realized that gambling had ruined his family and his life. His repentance and remorse showed that people can correct mistakes if they truly want to change. His apology was not just words but also actions that demonstrated his determination to start over. His humble attitude and sincerity in kneeling down to ask for forgiveness is a perfect example of how people can change if they repent and have the determination.

In addition, in the folk tales of the Pa Then ethnic group, there are also morals of being human such as: Bravely stand up to fight and protect life, do not submit to bad people, persevere against evil in *The Monster Story*, filial piety and love, despite being treated unfairly, still be filial and love parents in *The Stepmother and the Stepchild*,...

3. CONCLUSION

Folk tales of the Pa Then people are not only entertaining stories but also a rich treasure trove of knowledge, containing profound philosophies of life and human ethics. Through stories such as *The Stepmother and Her Stepchildren*, *The Legend of the Monkey and the Chicken Thigh Mushroom* good *The origin of the eight Pa Then ethnic clans of the Pa Then people* conveys valuable lessons about family responsibility, honesty, fairness and sacrifice for the community. These stories contribute to the formation of ethical standards in the community, helping people realize the value of life, family love and concern for the community. In particular, through the stories, the Pa Then people encourage an honest lifestyle, avoiding bad deeds and tricks, while promoting perseverance and determination to overcome difficulties to achieve happiness and success.

The philosophy of life and human ethics of the Pa Then people, although having the unique characteristics of a highland ethnic minority, have many similarities with the universal human values in other cultures, especially those of ethnic groups such as the H'mong, Tay, and Dao. These philosophies not only reflect a profound view of the relationship between people, but also with nature and society. By analyzing these stories, we can realize that although each ethnic group has its own cultural characteristics, basic moral values such as honesty, family love, and responsibility to the community are common elements in all cultures. Thereby, Pa Then folk tales not only help preserve and promote the cultural values of the nation but also serve as a source of inspiration and valuable lessons for all of us in modern life today.

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