

Original Paper

An Analysis of the Proverbs of sumpa in Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

This paper, from the ethical perspective, delves into the image of ethical personalities, ethical relationships and their values and limitations to the society of that time as contained in the sumpa Proverbs. The sumpa Proverbs present their ethical concepts and reflect the ethical context and values of the society at that time through the elaboration of the ethical relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, and the ruler and the people. By analyzing the sumpa Proverbs, this paper reveals the important role of ethics in social development and the problems it may bring, providing a new perspective for understanding Tibetan culture and its ethical concepts.

Keywords

sumpa Proverbs, Ethical Relationships, Ethical Personality, Ethical Contexts

1. Introduction

The sumpa Proverbs is considered to be the earliest collection of proverbs in the history of Tibetan literature. As folk literature, it contains rich ethical thoughts and moral concepts of the Tibetan people at that time. These proverbs not only reflect their ethical concepts, but also reveal the ethical context and value orientation of the society at that time. Through an in-depth analysis of the sumpa Proverbs, we can better understand the ethical connotation of Tibetan culture, as well as its positive role and potential limitations in social development. In this paper, we will explore the image of ethical personalities, ethical relationships and their impact on the society at that time as embodied in the sumpa Proverbs from an ethical perspective.

2. The Image of Ethical Personality in the sumpa Proverbs

Virtue theory is the concept of virtue (or virtue) as the center or foundation of ethical issues, and traditionally it focuses on “what kind of person one should be,” thus exploring “how one should act,” and arguing or explaining the norms and rationality of behavior. Ethics is significantly different from the normative ethics of behavioral rationality. From the middle of the 20th century to the 21st century,

the issue of “virtue” has entered the forefront of philosophical attention, and recent studies have shown that “virtue” has gradually become the core topic of Chinese philosophy and ethics (Jiang, 2019).

Chinese culture is a kind of virtue ethics, self-restraint, self-discipline, restraint, prudence, and then over time, the subconscious state will form a kind of gentleman personality, without external coercion can be a realm of integrity. In addition, Confucianism places special emphasis on role ethics. A gentleman should be a gentleman and a minister should be a minister. A gentleman should be a gentleman and a minister should be a minister; a father should have the requirements of a father and a son should have the requirements of a son, and this is the role ethics of Confucianism. This is totally different from the Western individualism, me-too, and especially the supremacy of individuality (Wang, 2025). Similarly, in many cases, Tibetan culture embodies an ethic of virtue, and in many Tibetan texts, there is the image of the wise man or the virtuous man as a personality, and it is often answered by the question of how to become a wise man or a virtuous man, and thus how we should behave. The sumpa Proverbs reveals the ethical context of the society and the values pursued by the society at that time through this characterization of the love of wisdom and the pursuit of kindness and harmony.

2.1 View of Wisdom

Throughout its long history, the Tibetan people have always shown great interest in the exploration of good and evil, and are a nation that obsessively ponders the nature of morality. As early as in ancient times, they have shown a passion for thinking, a strong desire for knowledge, and a highly valued attitude toward knowledge, and are a people who attach great importance to wisdom. At an early stage, they were already aware of their choice of ethical identity, which is fully reflected in the sumpa Proverbs. The sumpa Proverbs devote a great deal of space to the ethical relationships between people and society as a way of reminding people how to behave properly in their interpersonal interactions and social life.

The word “wisdom” appears many times in the sumpa proverbs. The clear distinction between wisdom and non-wisdom demonstrates the awakening of the Tibetan people and the society in which they live to their own ethical identity. This progress in thinking was due in large part to an atmosphere of love for wisdom and high regard for learning. The social environment in which they lived is clearly seen in sumpa proverbs, such as “To reproduce one's children and grandchildren without allowing them to learn is the root of making them fools; in this way, the meaning of reproduction is lost, and the stress of life is added in vain.” (བྱ་ཚ་བསྐྱེད་ལྟེ་སྒྲོབས་སྒྱུངས་མ་བྱས་ན་ནི་གཏི་མུག་གི་གཞི་བློ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་དོན་མེད་ལ། ལྟོ་བྱས་ཀྱི་གོན་ཆེན།) This is a profound reflection of the importance that society at that time placed on education and knowledge transmission. In addition, “If you seek a wise answer, ask a warm-hearted old man for advice. Although he may not have reached the state of complete enlightenment, with his rich experience, he is sufficient to help you with your problems.” (གཅེས་པའི་གྲོས་དང་སྒྲོ་འདོད་ན་ཀླད་པོ་ཡ་རབས་ལ་དྲིས་དང་། འཛེངས་ཤིང་བྱ་ཆེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཡང་། གོམས་པའི་ཤས་ཡོད་པས་སྒྲོ་ཆེད་པོ་འབྲུང་དོན་དུ་དཔྱད་འདོད་དང་། གཞོང་ཅན་མང་པོ་ཁ་བྱས་དང་། ཉན་ཀྱི་དཔྱད་ནོའོ།) This proverb also reflects the strong social culture of valuing wisdom, loving learning, and actively searching for answers. People respected knowledge and honored experience, creating a positive atmosphere that drove them to explore and progress in the realm of

thought and culture.

2.2 *The View of Kindness*

The History of Traditional Chinese Ethical Thought has this to say about Confucius' ren-ology: “‘Ren’ embodies the fundamental characteristic of Confucius' thought and constitutes the core of his ethical thought.” This assessment also applies to the ethical concepts of the Tibetans from the early days to the present time. In their culture, “benevolence” has always been the core of their ethical concepts, and this concept based on “benevolence” is centrally embodied in the attitudes of loving people and treating the ecological environment. In sumpa proverbs, love for oneself is expressed in the search for the meaning of personal life, teaching people how to minimize detours on the path of life. Love of people is expressed in interpersonal interactions, and it advocates an attitude of love of people, which ultimately leads to good results for the benefit of others, reflecting the value of balancing self-development and the well-being of others.

The sumpa proverbs contain many references to the benevolence of the king, which gives a distinctive political color to benevolence. The proverbs emphasize that the people should follow a benevolent king and be loyal to him”. (རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་མཆོད་པའི་མཆོད་པ་བཅད་ལྷག་པ་དཀར་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་མི་བྱུང་།) It reveals that the people will benefit from the rule of a benevolent ruler, and at the same time points out that if the king over-exploits the people, even something as stable as a rock will “roll down the hill” and cause unrest, illustrating the necessity of a benevolent government for maintaining political stability. This shows that benevolence is not only a moral code, but also an effective political tool to consolidate the ruling order and ensure social harmony.

In the sumpa Proverbs, benevolence is also presented in the form of calm and peaceful communication. In daily interactions, calm and peaceful communication reflects respect and tolerance for others and avoids conflicts and contradictions, which is a concrete practice of benevolence in interpersonal interactions, and it helps to create harmonious interpersonal relationships and a social atmosphere, so that the principle of benevolence can be realized. It helps to create a harmonious interpersonal relationship and social atmosphere, so that the concept of “benevolence” can take root in the smallest details of life and promote the benign functioning of society.

In the dimension of ecological ethics, the sumpa Proverbs has constructed a unique system of natural outlook, and established a moral framework for the interaction between human beings and nature through the dialectical interpretation of the concepts of biodiversity awareness and symbiosis. The text takes the example of “A snake that has not transgressed must be compassionate even if it is ferocious” as an example, revealing the core logic of eco-philosophy that breaks through the limitations of the utilitarian view of nature by setting up a dialectical structure of “biological behavior - human response” in the tension between risk perception and ethical judgment. The proposition empowers non-human organisms with the value of “error” as a moral discourse, and in fact constructs a universal ethical code that transcends the boundaries of species.

2.3 Harmony

The Tibetan people have always embraced an attitude of relentless pursuit of peace and harmony, which is manifested in a rich variety of forms. In the sumpa proverbs, the focus on how to deal with human relationships in order to achieve a state of harmony is reflected in a number of expressions.

The sumpa proverbs emphasize the use of appropriate language to build harmonious relationships, for example, “a wise word will satisfy both enemies and friends”, which vividly demonstrates that wise language has a strong infectious and conciliatory power, and can cross the boundaries of hostility and friendship to win the recognition and acceptance of all parties. A counter-example is also given in the sumpa proverb, “A person without wisdom never thinks before he speaks, just like a stone that falls off a cliff without turning back” (རི་ངོས་གཞན་པོ་ལ་ཕབ་འདྲིལ་བ་ནི་བརྒྱུ་དུ་མི་བཏབ་ཆུང་ན་པའི་ཆེག་ནི་ཐུ་བསམ་ཕྱི་མན་མེད།), graphically pointing out that the lack of wisdom is a cause for concern, and it is also an important factor in the development of the sumpa proverb.), figuratively pointing out that people who lack wisdom speak recklessly and recklessly, like a stone falling from a cliff that cannot be undone, and that “the words spoken by those who do not have wisdom will backfire on themselves, just as fire born in the wood burns the wood” (ཆུ་ངན་པའི་ཁ་ནས་ཆེག་ངན་པ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི་སྒྲར་བདག་ལ་གཞོན་ཆུ་ཐོག་མ་ཤིང་གི་ཁོང་དུ་བྱུང་ནས་སྒར་ཤིང་ཆེག་གོ།) ““A violent manner of speech stabs at the other person, while ruthlessness stabs back at oneself,” further elaborating that inappropriate speech not only hurts others , and ultimately will also bring bad consequences to oneself as well, deeply revealing the negative effects of bad language and attitude.

The proverb system constructs a cognitive schema of multiple symbiosis through the metaphorical treatment of differences in biological habits.” The phrase “the sparrow kisses the dawn, the owl hopes for the night” positions the survival strategies of different species on the time axis of the day-night cycle, and is thus a metaphor for the rationality of the diversity of social values. This rhetorical strategy of interpreting the humanistic order through natural phenomena forms the analogical cognitive model of “Biological Clock - Cultural Clock”, which elevates the coexistence of differences to the basic law of the universe. The text further extends this kind of ecological wisdom to the field of interpersonal communication, forming a harmonious value system with the dual dimensions of “nature and humanity”. The intertextual construction of the biological clock and the cultural rules realizes the transfer of values from natural laws to social ethics. This multi-level interpretive structure elevates the concept of harmony from concrete ecological practices to a meta-paradigm of cultural cognition.

3. The Ethical Relationship of sumpa Proverbs

In ancient Chinese society, there were the “Five Constants” or the “Five Luns”, i.e., the five main ethical relationships - ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, teacher and student, and friend. These five ethical relationships are the basic social relationships, and other social relationships, such as superior-subordinate relationships and coworker relationships, are subordinate to or derived from these relationships and are handled in accordance with ethical principles^[3]. The most typical ethical relationships mentioned in sumpa proverbs are husband and wife, ruler and citizen, and

parent-child relationship.

3.1 Husband and Wife Relationship

The ethical relationship between husband and wife presented in sumpa proverbs clearly shows the gender power structure and value orientation of a specific historical period. “To have a virtuous descendant, one can see the prosperity of the family; to marry a virtuous wife, one can say that one is blessed”, this proverb closely associates the wife's virtuousness with the virtuousness of the descendant and the prosperity of the family, highlighting the key role of the wife in the dimensions of family procreation and family inheritance, and the virtuous wife is regarded as an important source of the family's blessing. However, from the phrase “from the male's virtuousness or not, seen in his behavior; the female's virtuousness or not, seen in her cooking” (ཁྱེད་པ་མཛངས་པ་ནི་ཚུལ་ལས་མངོན་ལ། བྱ་མེད་མཛངས་ལྷ་ནི་བས་ལས་ལྷ་ངོ་།), as well as “A wise man with a good horse is famous outside, and a woman with a loose stone is hidden inside” (ཤོ་འཛངས་པ་དང་ཏ་མཁྱེགས་པ་ནི་ཕྱིར་བྱང་དང་གཤགས། བྱ་མེད་དང་གཡུ་རྩིང་ཕྱགས་སུ་ལྷ་མཛུགས་དང་བཅུན་ནོ།) These expressions clearly limit the scope of women's roles to the internal affairs of the family, emphasizing that housekeeping is the core responsibility of women, and profoundly reflect the confinement of and discrimination against women by a patriarchal society. Under the long-term domination of such ethical concepts, women's voice in family decision-making and participation in public affairs has been greatly weakened, and they have long been in a subordinate and disadvantaged position. From the perspective of the development of Tibetan literature at that time, the extreme scarcity of female writers is a strong example of this phenomenon, and the lack of educational opportunities has further strengthened the subordinate role of women in the family, making women bound to the family cage.

The relationship between husband and wife as described in the sumpa proverbs is characterized by a lack of reference to the responsibilities and duties of the man, while the character of the wife is meticulously scrutinized. For example, “When eating meat, the knife is sharp and the pieces are tasty; a lifelong companion is virtuous and virtuous, with a smile on her face”, which vividly outlines the idealized image of a virtuous and virtuous wife from the details of daily life. This unidirectional requirement has exacerbated the inequality in the relationship between husband and wife, and is a stereotypical portrayal of women's roles under the male-dominated social and ethical system. It is a stereotypical portrayal of women's roles under the patriarchal social and ethical system, which solidifies women's perception of their subordinate status and restricts women's self-development and value realization.

3.2 Parent-child Relationship

The ethical framework of children's education is reconstructed from the perspective of clan continuity, and the core proposition that “the heart is the best of goods, and the heir is the most important of wealth” is clearly stated. This assertion prioritizes the value of the heir over material wealth and establishes the position of family education in the family ecosystem. By constructing the dichotomy of “virtuous descendants - family prosperity” and “ungrateful descendants - family decline”, it reveals the decisive influence of intergenerational quality differences on the fate of the family. In particular, the

ecological metaphor of “the son is more wise than the father, like fire spreading on the lawn” vividly illustrates the kinetic energy of family development brought about by intergenerational progress.

At the level of intergenerational ethical norms, the text builds a two-way responsibility system, emphasizing the parents' main responsibility for education and stipulating the children's obligation to practice filial piety. By analogizing the necessity of parental existence to the elements of survival such as water and fire, the text establishes the absolute ethical status of filial piety through an existential perspective.” The analogical argument of “A father abandoned by his son is like a woolen blanket when it rains” demonstrates the existential dilemma caused by the lack of filial piety through the correlation between the natural environment and bodily perception, and this narrative strategy of embodied cognition effectively strengthens the contagiousness of moral exhortation.

The collection of proverbs elevates family education to the level of family governance by establishing the causal chain of “virtue - family fortune”. Its value system presents three distinctive features. It adopts the symbolic system of material symbols such as gold and dung and spatial imagery such as the family home and the frontier to construct a moral evaluation system, and strengthens the practical direction of ethical norms through the discussion of the correlation between physical experience and the need for survival, which reflects the deep knowledge of the traditional Tibetan society about the complexity of family education.

3.3 the Relationship between Ruler and People

The History of Western Ethical Thought points out that the development of ethical thought was closely linked to the class and political struggles of all times and societies, and in particular to the political needs of the ruling class. It has often been reduced in many forms, directly or indirectly, to a tool in the hands of the ruling class, and has become an important spiritual pillar for maintaining the rule of the exploiting class.

As a textual carrier of traditional Tibetan political ethics, the sumpa Proverbs realize the symbolic expression of the power structure through a system of metaphors. The proverb “It is difficult for a woman to dress up as a courtesan” is essentially a symbolic encoding of the hierarchical order, constructing a social cognitive framework with strict hierarchical characteristics through a figurative identity contrast. legitimacy of the feudal hierarchy.

The text does not limit itself to a unidirectional logic of domination. The proposition of “carrying a boat and overturning it” reveals a unique dialectical thinking about power: it places the stability of the monarch's power and the people's acceptance in a dynamic correlation structure, which not only establishes the legitimacy of “public opinion is like water”, but also implies a risky warning of the subversion of power. This dual path of interpretation is deepened in the statement that “a learned ruler still needs to learn from the wisdom of the people, and a good horse still needs to be spurred forward”, which forms a political ethical system with a self-regulating function through the construction of a correspondence between “limited knowledge” and “the necessity of checks and balances on power”.

The text presents a composite governance wisdom that maintains the vertical power structure at the

institutional level, and at the same time builds a horizontal balance of power through the establishment of “implementation of benevolent government” and “appointment of talents”. This dual-track narrative, which both emphasizes the authority of the ruler and recognizes the power of the people, essentially forms a flexible framework for maintaining the stability of the political ecology during the feudal period, and provides theoretical support and operational guidelines for the dynamic balance of the relationship between the ruler and the people in traditional society.

4. The Impact of Ethics on Society

4.1 The Social Value of Ethics at That Time

Ethics plays a crucial role in the process of social development and plays a positive role that cannot be ignored. In a well-organized and good ethical context, the social order can be stabilized, and there is an inextricable link between ethics and social stability, which provides a solid guarantee for the smooth operation of the society, effectively coordinates the social relations, and reduces conflicts and contradictions.

The construction of knowledge ethics has a decisive influence on the modernization process. When the social cognitive system forms the value orientation with the pursuit of truth as the core, this cognitive rationality-oriented ethical paradigm not only significantly improves the civilization quality of social subjects, but also injects sustainable innovation momentum for social development through the mechanism of knowledge innovation. Specifically, the establishment of the spirit of rationality prompts members of society to form a critical thinking mode, which guides practice through scientific methodology and continuously promotes the exploration of the laws of nature and the mechanism of social operation. The intergenerational transmission of the ethical system constitutes an important guarantee for the continuation of civilization. The will to seek truth embedded in the ethics of knowledge is transmitted through the institutionalized channel of education, and this spiritual tradition continues to act on social subjects through the mechanism of intergenerational transmission, motivating individuals to achieve self-improvement through the systematic accumulation of knowledge, and thus forming a virtuous cycle structure that promotes social development. In this process, the ethical system not only participates in the shaping of civilization as a cultural gene, but also plays a role in the whole process of social progress in the form of a power mechanism.

In the course of historical evolution, the Tibetan community, faced with the multidimensional challenges of the living environment, has formed a methodological system to cope with the complexity of the situation through the construction of a cognitive paradigm characterized by rational deliberation and accumulation of knowledge. This cognitive practice has not only cultivated a cultural and psychological structure with continuous adaptability, but also shaped the national spiritual traits with the core of resilience and enterprising consciousness. From the perspective of value system construction, it has constructed an ethical system centered on the concept of symbiosis with the value orientation of kindness and harmony, which profoundly influences the process of individual moral

development through the mechanism of intergenerational transmission. This ethical paradigm has been materialized into caregiving practices in the family arena and community mutual aid in the public sphere. At the level of kinship, it is manifested in multi-level emotional support and shared responsibility; at the level of strangers' interaction, it is transformed into a tradition of altruistic assistance and resource sharing across bloodlines. Through continuous behavioral reinforcement, such ethical practices enable group members to develop inter-subjective cognition characterized by empathy and inclusiveness, and thus construct culturally identifiable moral personality types. The function of this kind of ethical system extends beyond the boundaries of ethnic groups, forming the ethical basis for cross-cultural dialog. It emphasizes that the value of coexistence of differences is transformed into the practical logic of mutual understanding and sharing in ethnic interactions, and effectively promotes the value resonance of pluralistic symbolic systems through the elimination of cultural hierarchical presuppositions and the establishment of an equal dialogue mechanism. This ethical adaptability not only maintains the tension of cultural diversity, but also constructs a social ecology of multicultural coexistence and development at the structural level.

4.2 Limitations of Ethics

In the complex relationship between ethics and morality, there exists a subtle tension. Moral ideals and individual identities are often difficult to fit together, and individual identities, as conditions for the realization of morality, may constrain and distort morality, as well as the possibility of whitewashing reality. Once this tension is ignored, ethics may cross the line and replace morality. Ethics, as the order created by social structure and organization, should be secondary to morality as the ultimate value. Since the realization of morality depends on the means provided by ethics, in reality ethics has a decisive influence on the formation of individual morality, and the boundary between ethics and morality becomes blurred at a certain level. In this way, morality is prone to alienation, and powerful forces that transcend morality itself, such as political power and social authority, become the dominant force in formulating moral rules and shaping moral judgments. Looking back at history, this phenomenon is commonplace. In traditional societies, the status of women is lower than that of men, and this unreasonable ethical concept overrides morality, resulting in a distorted view of morality. Worse still, women themselves have been victimized, believing that it is only ethical for them to live quietly in a corner. This kind of ethical concept has been turned into a moral concept in an official manner, leading to cognitive bias, which in turn leads to the manipulation of behaviors and is widely accepted by the society at large. Similarly, at the level of class concepts, the common man is often indoctrinated to think that he is inferior. In the long run, such ethical concepts gradually erode and distort the morality of the commoners, so that the erroneous notion of "inherently inferior" is accepted as a moral code. Unconsciously, ethics has alienated moral concepts, and the formation of such alienated ethical concepts has led to a series of irrational rules, which inevitably lead to many tragedies in the process of rules operation, and seriously impede the development of the society.

5. Conclusion

With its unique ethical concepts and moral wisdom, The sumpa Proverbs provides important guidance for their social life. The ethical concepts it promotes not only promote the shaping of the ethical personality of the Tibetan people, but also lay a solid foundation for the stability and development of the society. These ethical concepts are not perfect, and to a certain extent there are problems such as limitations on women and the solidification of class concepts. The limitations of these ethical concepts remind us that we need to draw wisdom from the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture, and we also need to reflect on and criticize the irrational factors therein, so as to promote the ethical construction of modern society.

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