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FOLKLORE AS AN AXIOLOGICAL STABILIZER: A CONCEPTUAL SYSTEMS MODEL OF MORAL VALUES IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual article explains how social change alters the relative priority of moral values and how folklore may contribute to their stabilization. It integrates axiology, argumentation theory, folklore studies, narrative research, collective-memory theory, and systems thinking. The model was developed through four analytical stages: delimiting the principal constructs, specifying theoretically supported causal relations, assigning directional polarity, and organizing the relations into feedback loops. The resulting model distinguishes social change, axiological evaluation, value-system priority, stabilization efforts, folklore activation, narrative salience, value internalization, value-congruent conduct, perceived legitimacy, national-value recognition, value conflict, and critical reinterpretation. Two reinforcing loops explain how culturally familiar narratives can increase the intelligibility, circulation, and legitimacy of values and can associate them with collective identity. A balancing loop explains how conflict can stimulate reinterpretation and contextualization. The model also identifies a credibility constraint: inconsistency between proclaimed values and institutional practice weakens legitimacy and internalization. The article does not claim empirical causal effects; it offers a testable conceptual framework for future content analysis, surveys, interviews, experiments, and longitudinal research. Folklore is therefore treated neither as a passive inheritance nor as an unquestionable authority, but as a dynamic and potentially ambivalent resource in moral communication.

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Keywords: *social change; moral values; axiological evaluation; folklore; value stabilization; narrative persuasion; systems thinking; causal-loop model.*

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1. Introduction

Every society maintains a partly structured system of moral values through which individuals and communities evaluate conduct, institutions, relationships, and public events. Values are relatively enduring, but they are not equally salient in every historical situation. Schwartz (1992, 2012) describes values as ordered priorities whose relative importance guides judgment and action. Nazarov (2004) similarly places values within historically formed social relations and human evaluative activity. Social transformation therefore need not produce an entirely new moral world. More often, it reorganizes the hierarchy of existing values and changes the circumstances in which they are invoked.

Economic crisis may increase the urgency of solidarity, generosity, and mutual support. Conflict or external threat may foreground courage, loyalty, collective responsibility, and defense of the community. Rapid technological change may strengthen public concern with responsibility, privacy, truth, intellectual autonomy, and information ethics. Migration, social fragmentation, and generational tension

may intensify attention to tolerance, cultural continuity, social trust, and identity. In each case, social change influences which moral principles are perceived as immediately necessary, but it does not mechanically replace one value with another.

A value's increased visibility does not guarantee its practical acceptance. Official declarations, educational slogans, or repeated public references may leave conduct unchanged when the value remains abstract, poorly justified, or contradicted by institutional practice. Stabilization requires interpretation, argumentation, emotional engagement, repetition, social recognition, and credible enactment. It is therefore necessary to explain how a value moves from public visibility to internalized judgment and socially recognizable behavior.

Moral argumentation provides reasons for preferring a judgment, norm, or course of action. Walton (2003) and Medvedev and Murzina (2022) treat moral argumentation as practical reasoning that links facts, obligations, consequences, goals, and evaluative commitments. Fayzixo'jayeva (2021) emphasizes its communicative character: an argument is effective only when the relationship between a claim and an audience's accepted knowledge is intelligible. Mercier and Sperber (2017) likewise locate reasoning within social interaction, where arguments are produced, evaluated, challenged, and revised.

Folklore is important within this communicative process because it presents moral experience in culturally familiar forms. Proverbs, legends, epics, tales, ritual expressions, songs, and traditional narratives classify conduct, associate values with consequences, and provide memorable models of character. Bascom (1954) identified several social functions of folklore, while Ben-Amos (1971) defined folklore as artistic communication in small groups and Bauman (1977) emphasized performance and context. These approaches shift attention from folklore as a static archive to folklore as situated social action.

The central problem is that studies of value change, moral argumentation, folklore, narrative influence, and systems dynamics are often discussed separately. The present article connects them in a single conceptual model. It asks: (1) how can the relationship among social change, axiological evaluation, and folklore be represented through causal-loop logic; (2) through which reinforcing mechanisms might folklore contribute to moral-value stabilization; and (3) under what conditions might folklore mediate or intensify value conflict?

The article's argument is deliberately limited. It does not claim to measure value change in Uzbekistan or any other society, and it does not infer causal effects from a folklore corpus. It develops a conceptual systems model whose propositions can be tested in later empirical research. Although the study is informed by Uzbek philosophical and argumentative scholarship, the model is formulated at a general theoretical level.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Moral values as dynamic priorities

Moral values are conceptions of desirable conduct, character, relationships, and collective life. Justice, honesty, compassion, responsibility, dignity, freedom, loyalty, respect, and solidarity operate as standards through which actions are approved or condemned. Values differ from isolated preferences because they are linked to broader judgments about what deserves protection, recognition, or sacrifice. They also differ from fixed rules because several legitimate values may apply simultaneously to the same situation.

Value plurality produces both compatibility and conflict. Freedom may conflict with security, loyalty with impartiality, innovation with continuity, and individual interest with collective responsibility. Schwartz's (1992, 2012) theory is especially useful because it treats value priorities as an organized system in which some motivations are compatible and others are opposed. Kinnier, Kernes, and Dautheribes (2000) identify moral commitments that recur across philosophical and cultural traditions, but recurrent moral content does not eliminate cultural variation in expression, hierarchy, or application.

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Axiological evaluation is the process through which people and institutions judge the significance and relative priority of values. The process is historically situated. Social needs, collective memories, institutions, perceived threats, and available narratives affect which values are foregrounded and how they are interpreted. A society can therefore retain a recognizable moral vocabulary while substantially changing the practical weight assigned to its terms.

In this article, moral-value stabilization means the process through which a value acquires continuity, legitimacy, recognition, and behavioral influence. Stabilization is not immutability. A stable value may be reinterpreted, expressed in new forms, or applied to new circumstances. Its stability lies in the persistence of normative authority and in its continued availability as a criterion of evaluation.

2.2. Folklore as an axiological and argumentative resource

Folklore preserves and recreates collective experience in forms that can be remembered, repeated, adapted, and performed. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) stresses that living heritage is transmitted across generations and continually recreated by communities in response to their environment and history. This emphasis on transmission and recreation is central to the present model: folklore does not merely carry inherited meanings; it is repeatedly selected and recontextualized.

Many folkloric genres contain explicit or implicit evaluations of conduct. Proverbs condense generalized judgments; tales organize conflict through character and consequence; epics present exemplary or contested models of action; legends connect moral claims with communal, sacred, or historical authority; and rituals connect values with recurring practice. Dundes (1965) demonstrated the breadth of folklore as a field, while Ben-Amos (1971) and Bauman (1977) showed that meaning depends on communicative context and performance.

Folklore can function argumentatively. A proverb may serve as an implicit premise supporting a recommendation or warning. A traditional narrative may provide an analogy by which a contemporary situation is classified. A heroic episode may embody a reason for admiring courage, loyalty, or sacrifice. Such arguments are often enthymematic: speakers do not state every premise because they expect audiences to recognize the cultural rule embedded in the expression. This mechanism fits interactionist accounts of reason, in which successful argumentation depends on audience recognition and the possibility of response (Mercier & Sperber, 2017).

Narrative research helps explain why this form of communication may be influential. Bruner (1991) treats narrative as a mode through which reality is organized and interpreted. Fisher (1984) argues that people evaluate stories partly through coherence and fidelity to lived experience. Green and Brock (2000) show that transportation into a narrative can shape story-consistent beliefs, while Oatley (2016) describes fiction as a simulation of social worlds. These findings do not prove that folklore automatically changes moral behavior, but they support the narrower proposition that narrative form can affect attention, identification, emotional engagement, and the accessibility of evaluative conclusions.

The authority of folklore is neither uniform nor absolute. Different proverbs can support opposing conclusions, and inherited narratives can reproduce exclusion, hierarchy, or stereotypes. Folklore is therefore a plural discursive field rather than a single moral code. Its effects depend on which material is selected, who performs it, which audience receives it, and how the material is connected with current institutions and conflicts.

2.3. Internalization, memory, and legitimacy

Exposure to a moral message is not identical to internalization. Internalization occurs when a value becomes a personally meaningful criterion of judgment rather than merely an external demand. Grusec and Goodnow (1994) show that internalization depends on how messages are perceived and interpreted, while Bandura (2001) emphasizes observational learning, symbolic modeling, and the interaction between cognition, behavior, and social environment. Folklore can participate in these processes by making moral

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situations imaginable and by providing characters with whom audiences identify or against whom they define themselves.

Repeated narratives also contribute to collective memory. Halbwachs (1992) emphasizes that memory is socially framed, and Assmann (2011) explains how cultural memory preserves identity through external forms that outlast direct interpersonal recollection. Traditional narratives can therefore connect present moral claims with remembered collective experience. McAdams (2001) further shows how narrative gives continuity and meaning to identity at the individual level. The model extends this logic cautiously to collective moral communication: repeated association between a value and culturally important narratives may increase recognition of that value as part of a community's self-description.

Legitimacy depends on consistency between communication and practice. A society may repeatedly praise honesty while institutions reward deception, or celebrate justice while tolerating unequal treatment. In such cases, the credibility of the moral message declines. Narrative communication can support stabilization, but it cannot permanently substitute for consistent conduct. This relationship is included in the model as a credibility constraint rather than as a separate reinforcing loop.

2.4. Systems thinking and feedback

Systems thinking is appropriate when an outcome arises from interacting processes rather than a single independent cause. Anderson and Johnson (1997) describe causal-loop diagrams as tools for representing patterns of mutual influence. Richardson (1991) traces feedback thinking in social theory, while Meadows (2008) and Sterman (2000) emphasize that system behavior emerges from feedback, delay, accumulation, and nonlinear interaction.

A causal-loop model does not by itself establish empirical causality or quantify effect size. It makes assumptions visible. A positive link means that, other conditions being equal, an increase in one variable is expected to increase the next variable above what it otherwise would have been; a negative link means that an increase is expected to reduce the next variable. Reinforcing loops amplify an initial change, whereas balancing loops counteract change or move the system toward a different configuration. These signs indicate direction, not moral approval.

The value of the method for the present problem is analytical transparency. It requires the author to identify the constructs, state the direction of each proposed relation, define the model boundary, and distinguish reinforcing dynamics from constraints and balancing processes.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Scope and analytical procedure

This is a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical investigation. The model was developed from the intersection of four bodies of scholarship: value theory and axiology; moral argumentation and reasoning; folklore, narrative, and collective memory; and systems thinking. The literature was used to clarify constructs and justify directional relationships, not to calculate pooled effects or to claim a systematic review.

Model development proceeded in four stages. First, the initial concepts in the manuscript were delimited so that each variable referred to a distinct process. Second, theoretically supported relationships were identified between pairs of variables. Third, each relationship was assigned a directional polarity and checked for conceptual ambiguity. Fourth, the relationships were organized into closed feedback loops and reviewed for boundary problems, omitted constraints, and overstatement. Claims were then calibrated as propositions that require empirical testing.

The model boundary includes moral communication and value-related social processes. It excludes the detailed structure of political institutions, economic systems, religious authority, media ownership, and demographic change, although these factors can enter the model through the broad variable of social change or can be added in context-specific extensions. The model also does not assume that a society is homogeneous; the same narrative may be interpreted differently by different groups.

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3.2. Variables and operational meaning

Table 1 defines the model variables in a form suitable for later operationalization. The definitions separate public visibility from internalization and distinguish national-value recognition from the intrinsic moral worth of a value.

Table 1.

Conceptual variables and possible empirical indicators

Variable	Conceptual definition	Possible empirical indicators
Social change	Political, economic, technological, demographic, environmental, or cultural transformation that alters the conditions of moral judgment.	Policy or institutional change; public crises; technological adoption; migration; media change.
Axiological evaluation	Collective or individual assessment of the relevance and relative priority of values under changing conditions.	Surveyed value rankings; public discourse; evaluative language; institutional priorities.
Value-system priority	The relative position of a value within a wider hierarchy of compatible and competing values.	Frequency and prominence of value references; trade-off judgments; agenda position.
Stabilization efforts	Communicative, educational, cultural, and institutional activity intended to maintain or strengthen a value.	Curricula; public campaigns; ceremonies; speeches; family transmission; cultural programming.
Folklore activation	Selection and use of proverbs, narratives, symbols, characters, or performances to interpret or justify a value.	Genre frequency; quotation and allusion; performance context; media circulation.
Narrative salience and intelligibility	The degree to which a value becomes memorable, emotionally meaningful, and culturally comprehensible through narrative form.	Recall; identification; emotional response; perceived relevance; narrative transportation.
Value internalization	Adoption of a value as a personally or collectively meaningful criterion of judgment and action.	Reasoning in dilemmas; self-reported importance; spontaneous justification; behavioral choice.
Value-congruent conduct	Behavior interpreted as consistent with the promoted value.	Observed behavior; institutional decisions; reported practices; sanction and reward patterns.
Perceived legitimacy	The degree to which a value claim and its advocates are regarded as credible, justified, and worthy of compliance.	Trust; acceptance; perceived consistency; willingness to endorse or follow.
National-value recognition	Public association of a value with collective identity, cultural memory, and a community's self-description.	Textbooks; ceremonies; official discourse; heritage institutions; intergenerational narratives.
Value conflict	Tension among legitimate values, groups, interpretations, or inherited and emerging expectations.	Competing frames; controversy; polarization; counter-proverbs; interpretive disagreement.
Critical reinterpretation	Reflective examination and contextual adaptation of inherited material in response to conflict or changed conditions.	Alternative readings; dialogue; contextual teaching; revised performances; public debate.

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3.3. Causal-loop structure

Figure 1 presents the proposed relationships. The main pathway moves from social change to axiological evaluation, changing value-system priority, stabilization efforts, folklore activation, narrative salience, internalization, value-congruent conduct, and perceived legitimacy. Closed paths form reinforcing and balancing feedback loops. The model also displays two non-equivalent effects of folklore activation: contextualized use may support intelligibility and mediation, whereas selective or dogmatic use may intensify conflict.

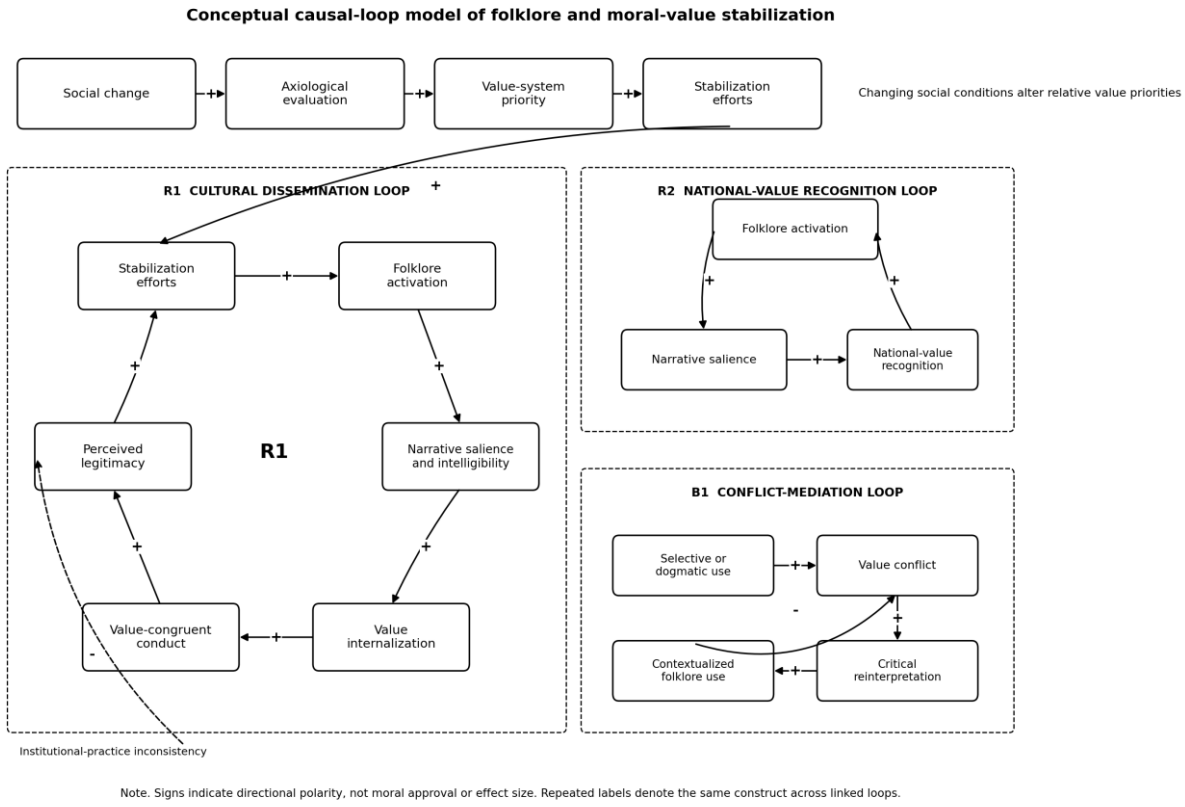


Figure 1. Conceptual causal-loop model of folklore and moral-value stabilization.

4. PROPOSED FEEDBACK MECHANISMS AND THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

4.1. Social change and the reorganization of value priorities

The model begins with the proposition that social change modifies the environment in which moral evaluations are made. A value becomes more salient when it appears capable of responding to a recognized problem. Solidarity may become urgent when isolated action is insufficient; justice may move to the foreground when inequality or abuse becomes visible; responsibility may become central when technological or institutional actions generate consequences at a distance.

The relationship is mediated by axiological evaluation. Social change does not speak in a single voice, and different groups may interpret the same transformation differently. A technological innovation can be framed as freedom, risk, progress, inequality, or loss of control. The model therefore places axiological evaluation between social change and value-system priority rather than assuming a direct mechanical response.

Proposition 1: Social change alters the relative public salience of moral values through contested processes of axiological evaluation; it does not necessarily change the intrinsic content of those values.

4.2. R1: The cultural dissemination loop

The first reinforcing loop links stabilization efforts, folklore activation, narrative salience, internalization, conduct, and legitimacy. When a value receives greater priority, educators, families, cultural institutions, speakers, and media actors have stronger incentives to explain and disseminate it.

Folkloric forms are attractive because they are memorable, culturally recognizable, and adaptable to different communicative settings.

A proverb can condense a general rule into a short expression. A tale can connect an action with its consequences. An epic or legendary figure can embody a moral quality in a socially visible character. Narrative form reduces abstraction by organizing moral information through situation, conflict, agency, emotion, and resolution. Bruner (1991), Fisher (1984), Green and Brock (2000), and Oatley (2016) provide different but compatible reasons for expecting narrative form to affect interpretation and engagement.

Narrative salience does not equal internalization, but it can make a value cognitively accessible and emotionally meaningful. Repeated exposure, identification, discussion, and observed models can support the transition from recognition to personally meaningful judgment (Bandura, 2001; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). When internalized values are expressed in conduct, that conduct supplies visible examples that can increase the perceived legitimacy of the value. Greater legitimacy then strengthens future stabilization efforts, completing the reinforcing loop.

The loop is conditional. If the promoted value is contradicted by institutional practice, the return from conduct to legitimacy becomes weak or negative. A slogan praising justice cannot stabilize justice when audiences repeatedly observe arbitrary treatment. The model therefore includes institutional-practice inconsistency as a negative constraint on perceived legitimacy.

Proposition 2: Folklore is most likely to contribute to value stabilization when culturally recognizable narratives increase salience and intelligibility, and when public or institutional practice does not systematically contradict the promoted value.

4.3. R2: The national-value recognition loop

A second reinforcing loop concerns the association between moral values, cultural memory, and collective identity. A value that is repeatedly linked with familiar narratives, historical figures, rituals, or communal experiences may come to be described not merely as useful in a particular crisis but as characteristic of the community. Halbwachs (1992) and Assmann (2011) explain how socially organized memory supplies continuity across generations; folklore is one of the media through which that continuity is performed.

National-value recognition can increase institutional attention. A value associated with collective identity may enter curricula, ceremonies, public commemorations, museums, artistic production, and official discourse. Institutional recognition can then increase the selection and circulation of folkloric materials associated with that value, strengthening the connection between narrative and identity.

This loop must not be interpreted as proof that a value is unique to one nation or unanimously accepted within it. Kinnier et al. (2000) and Schwartz (1992, 2012) show that many moral concerns recur across cultures. National form arises through specific languages, symbols, priorities, and historical narratives. Moreover, social groups can disagree over which traditions represent the nation and what those traditions mean.

Proposition 3: Repeated and institutionally supported association between a moral value and collective memory can increase recognition of that value as part of national identity, but the process remains selective, contested, and historically revisable.

4.4. B1: Value conflict, mediation, and critical reinterpretation

Reinforcing processes do not continue without limits. Strong promotion of one value may create tension with another legitimate value. Appeals to unity may conflict with autonomy; tradition may be framed as incompatible with innovation; tolerance may raise disputes about boundaries; loyalty may conflict with impartial justice. Such tensions activate the balancing loop.

Value conflict increases the need for interpretation rather than simple repetition. Folklore can contribute to mediation because traditions rarely contain only one narrative pattern. Different stories and proverbs may prioritize caution or initiative, obedience or resistance, collective duty or individual integrity.

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When plural materials are examined comparatively, they can make the structure of a moral conflict visible and offer culturally intelligible distinctions.

Critical reinterpretation reduces conflict only under certain conditions. It must identify the assumptions of a narrative, the context in which it was persuasive, the values it protects, the groups it may exclude, and the limits of transferring it to a new situation. Contextualization can then weaken dogmatic application and allow a value to be reformulated in relation to dignity, justice, and changed social conditions.

Folklore can also intensify conflict. Selective quotation, decontextualization, or institutional monopolization may turn inherited narratives into instruments of exclusion. A proverb used as a final authority can close discussion rather than enrich it. The plus/minus link from folklore activation to value conflict in Figure 1 represents this ambivalence.

Proposition 4: Folklore can balance value conflict when it is used as a plural resource for contextual interpretation, but selective or dogmatic use can reinforce conflict and reduce the credibility of moral claims.

4.5. Argument refinement and audience responsiveness

The production and evaluation of moral arguments form an additional process within the larger loops. Repeated communication exposes arguments to objections, counterexamples, alternative interpretations, and new social situations. Speakers learn which premises an audience accepts, which analogies are intelligible, and where a traditional expression fails to address contemporary experience. Mercier and Sperber (2017) describe reasoning as socially interactive, while Fayzixo'jayeva (2021) emphasizes the relationship between argumentation and communication.

Folkloric arguments can therefore be revised without losing their cultural grounding. A proverb may be treated as an initial generalization rather than an unquestionable conclusion. A tale may be compared with alternative narratives. A heroic image may be examined for both exemplary and exclusionary features. This approach treats folklore as a field of moral reasoning rather than a collection of commands.

Proposition 5: The stabilizing capacity of folklore increases when traditional narratives remain open to argumentative testing, alternative interpretation, and audience response.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The conceptual model can guide empirical studies, but its links should not be treated as established effects. Different methods are required for different parts of the system. Content analysis can examine which values and genres become prominent during periods of social change. Historical comparison can test whether particular narratives are reactivated when public concerns shift. Interviews and focus groups can examine how audiences interpret the same proverb or tale and whether interpretations differ by generation, region, occupation, or educational background.

Survey and experimental designs can investigate narrative salience, identification, perceived legitimacy, and value internalization. Participants could compare an abstract moral argument with a proverb-based or narrative version while controlling for message content. Measures should distinguish immediate agreement from delayed recall, dilemma reasoning, and behavior. Network or discourse analysis can identify which institutions and media actors circulate particular narratives.

Longitudinal research is necessary to examine feedback. A causal-loop proposition predicts reciprocal influence over time, not merely a cross-sectional association. Researchers could track public discourse, institutional practice, and audience response before and after a major social event. System-dynamics simulation would require explicit equations, parameter estimates, delays, and sensitivity analysis; the present causal-loop diagram is a preliminary qualitative structure rather than such a simulation.

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In the Uzbek context, future research could build transparent corpora of proverbs, epic episodes, public speeches, school materials, and digital communication, with clearly defined periods and coding procedures. Such work would allow the general model to be tested without presuming that all groups share the same value hierarchy or interpretation of national tradition.

6. LIMITATIONS

The model has five principal limitations. First, it is conceptual and does not provide evidence of causal magnitude. Second, the literature synthesis is integrative rather than systematic, so it may not capture every relevant theory or empirical result. Third, the broad category of folklore combines genres whose communicative properties differ substantially. Fourth, social groups are heterogeneous, and the same traditional material can produce different or opposing interpretations. Fifth, the model simplifies institutional, religious, political, and economic processes that can independently shape value legitimacy.

These limitations do not invalidate the model's analytical purpose. They define its proper use: the diagram is a transparent set of propositions and a guide for research design, not an empirical representation of an entire society.

7. CONCLUSION

Social change restructures the circumstances under which moral values are evaluated, prioritized, and communicated. It does not necessarily eliminate inherited values or create wholly new ones. Instead, it alters their relative urgency and generates new conflicts over interpretation and application.

Folklore has a distinctive place in this process because it connects abstract moral principles with culturally recognizable language, characters, situations, and consequences. It can function as argument, analogy, warning, example, memory, and model. Its persuasive potential arises not from automatic traditional authority but from familiarity, narrative organization, collective recognition, and communicative performance.

The proposed systems model distinguishes two reinforcing processes and one balancing process. The cultural dissemination loop explains how folklore activation may increase narrative salience, internalization, value-congruent conduct, and perceived legitimacy. The national-value recognition loop explains how repeated association with collective memory may increase institutional and cultural reproduction. The conflict-mediation loop explains how tension can stimulate critical reinterpretation and contextualization. The model also recognizes that dogmatic selection may intensify conflict and that inconsistency between proclaimed values and practice weakens legitimacy.

Folklore should therefore be regarded neither as a passive remnant of the past nor as an unquestionable moral authority. It is a dynamic and ambivalent communicative resource. Its contribution to moral continuity depends on selection, interpretation, context, institutional credibility, and openness to criticism. By making these interdependencies explicit, the systems approach offers a testable framework for studying how societies maintain moral continuity while responding to change.

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