

SCTCMG 2018
**International Scientific Conference “Social and Cultural
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism”**

**EPOS OF MONGOLIAN PEOPLE IN MODERN PERFORMANCE:
PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL MOTIVES**

E.E. Khabunova (a)*, L.S. Dampilova (b), A. Alimaa (c), B.V. Elbikoiva (d)

*Corresponding author

(a) Kalmyk State University, 11, Pushkina Street, 358000, Elista, Russia,

(b) Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan studies, 6, Sakh'yanova Street, 670047, Ulan-Ude, Russia,

(c) Institute of language and literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 54a, Zhukov Street, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia,

(d) Kalmyk State University, 11, Pushkina Street, 358000, Elista, Russia,

Abstract

The article touches upon the issues of preserving the epos of the Mongolian people in modern times. It is highlighted that great importance for the continuation of the epic tradition is given to motives that convey the ideological and belles meaning, the stadial specificity and national, local feature of the epic work. During the course of refining the categories defining the concept of “motive”, the following aspects are taken into account: “structurally meaningful independence” of the motive, its “minimal”, “predicativeness”, “connection with the event”, special emphasis is placed on the aspect of attachment of the motive to symbolic formations characterizing by constancy in the epic narrative of a tradition. A comparative analysis is made of the motivational fund of the asynchronical recordings of the Mongol-Oirat epos containing an archaic plot about the heroic marriage and continuing its existence today.

During the course of the study, it was traced how the nuclear part of the epic motive in the form of an invariant motive ensures the preservation of the main storyline and the underlying ideological and belles' basis. Particular attention was paid to the presence or absence in the epic narrative, reproduced at the present time, of the motive-variant, contributing to the detailing of the events, phenomena and relations depicted in the epic. The analysis of asynchronical recordings of the Mongol-Oirat epos showed that modern performers, actively using the motivational fund, do not deviate from the main plot of the epic, that the thematic composition of motives – invariants remains almost unchanged.

© 2019 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.UK

Keywords: Epos, narrator, tradition, preservation, motive, tendency.



1. Introduction

The epos of the Mongolian people was performed, preserved over many centuries, and orally passed down from generation to generation due to the efforts of narrators (djangarchs, tuulchs, uligershins). The modern narrator of the epos, in most cases, reproduces the book text, that is, what he remembered visually, and not by ear, which indicates that the traditional form of oral transmission of the epic story has changed significantly. The concept of “tradition” presupposes, above all, the continuity, which ensures the dependence of folklore neoplasms on the preceding creative process. The familiarization of the professional experience of the previous generation of narrators, singers and its oral transmission to a new generation of performers of folklore work within the framework of the prevailing rules and favorable conditions (language, socio-economic, cultural) guarantees the further development of the tradition. The process of familiarization of the art of storytelling can be successful under the condition of direct adherence to tradition, careful study of the professional experience of previous epos narrators. The works of A. Lord and his teacher M. Perry in the field of the theory of composition and existence of the epic text, in which special attention is paid to the process of teaching the singer and distinguishing between the three stages of the process of becoming a narrator. According to Lord, the essence of the first stage is that the beginning singer simply listens, meets the characters, begins to recognize poetic topics, absorb the rhythm of singing and to some extent also the rhythm of expression of thoughts in the song (Lord, 1994).

The performers of the epos in Kalmykia, Western Mongolia and XUAR of China do not hide the fact that they first began to memorize epic texts from manuscripts, textbooks, printed editions and continue the practice of memorizing a book epic. Such a way of memorizing, as it were, eliminates writing. Nevertheless, each performer of epos has own technique of memorizing and reproducing an epic text. “The memory of the singer is distinguished by his strength and quick receptivity, but also by conservatism, which interlocks with the conservatism of consciousness.” (Putilov, 1997) This feature allows narrators to keep volumetric texts in memory intact. An important role in this process should be given to the preservation of the collection of traditional motives that convey the ideological and artistic meaning, the stadial specificity and the national peculiarity of epic work.

2. Problem Statement

The preservation of the richest epic heritage of the Mongolian people (Russian Kalmyks and Buryats, Mongols of the Mongolian People's Republic and Oirat Mongols of China) was possible due to the efforts of the narrators who performed and transmitted the epic within the framework of “centuries of consecrated tradition”. The modern performer of the epos, in most cases, reproduces the book text, that is, what he remembered visually, and not by ear. This way of memorizing, as it were, eliminates writing. Nevertheless, each modern performer of the epos has own technique of memorizing and reproducing an epic plot, owning a certain set of motives.

The importance of studying and preserving the motive fund of the epos of the Mongolian people actualizes the need to study the presence or absence of traditional motives in the epic narrative of modern performers of the epos.

3. Research Questions

The concept of “tradition” presupposes, above all, the continuity, which ensures the dependence of folklore new compositions on the preceding creative process. The familiarization of the professional experience of the previous generation of narrators, singers and its oral transmission to a new generation of performers of folklore work within the framework of the prevailing rules and favourable conditions (language, socio-economic, cultural) guarantees the further development of the tradition. An important role in this process is played by traditional motives that convey the ideological and belles meaning, the stadia specificity and the national peculiarity of epic work. In this regard, the subject of this study is the Oirat-Mongolian epos, including a set of motives characteristic of the archaic plot of the epic of the Mongolian people. The article also discusses theoretical aspects that reveal the main criteria that characterize the concept of “motive”.

According to Veselovsky A.N. traditionally, in Russian folklore, “the simplest narrative unit, figuratively responding to various requests of the primitive mind or everyday behaviour” is understood under the concept of motive, meaning. It means that Veselovsky A.N. refers figurativeness, and not morphological integrity to the main value determining the essence of the concept of the motif. (in cited in Propp, 1928). The motive as a traditional, repetitive element of folklore and literary narration and the category of motive, as it is interpreted in Russian literature and folklore studies are investigated in detail by Silantyev I.V. (Silantyev, 1999).

The duality of the motive reasons the need to take into account its various aspects, depending on its location (in folklore genres) and the discovery in the narrative essence of the folklore work.

B.N. Putilov, considers the motive “not just as an element, a component constructing a plot”, he notes that “the epic motive programs and conditions the plot development”, that “this development is determined one way or another”. Moreover the author gives grounds to admit “generating” property of motives that “stand at the origins of a plot and imply a specific movement of it” (Putilov, 1975). The question regarding the concept of “motive” remains open, its meaning is interpreted differently, its structural functions, semantic content are clarified.

The motive manifests itself in different genres of folklore, which creates certain difficulties in the use of this term in the analysis of material that is different from each other, for example, the motive in the ritual text (feasting brothers in the song of the Mongolian people) both structurally and semantically not equivalent to an epic motive (heroic feast). The once common ritual and mythological basis of the feast motive, symbolizing unity for ritual food, was later filled with additional semantics: in the wedding song it manifested the interbreeding of two generations, in the epic context it marked the centric role of the hierarchical structure in the epic model of the world (the feast led by Khormusst celestial – in the Buryat Geseriade, headed by Khan Dzhangar in the middle world, in the lower world with Erlik, the nomine khan - in Kalmyk “Dzhangar”). Losing its mythological and ritual meaning, the motive of the feast becomes more succinct with time in its semantics and in terms of uniting society, more meaningful than just “a form of social intercourse”, it can mark the collision locus of both different interests and contradictions, as well as heroic actions. Consequently, in relation to the epic, moreover, to the national epic narratives, a more succinct definition of the notion “motive” is required.

Given the structural and semantic nature of the motive, the authors consider it as a mechanism synthesizing the semantic and constructive beginning of the epic narrative, in which the predicate plays a decisive role. This property of motive is emphasized in the definition of E.M. Meletynsky, according to which the motive means “a certain micro-plot containing a predicate (action), agent, patient and carrying a more or less independent and deep meaning” (Meletinsky, 1994).

The dominant role of the predicate, both in the formation of the motive and in the organization of the epic plot, consisting of various combinations of motives, is also a peculiarity of the epic of the Mongolian people. In every national epic, except for genre-based type motives, there is a traditional set of motives that determine its ethnic specificity, ensuring the mobility of an invariant model of the epic plot. For example, the “heroic collision” type peculiarity of the world epos as a whole finds its realization through different motives in national traditions: the Khan’s order, the antagonist’s heroic challenge, the hero’s antagonist’s help (Kalmyk epic tradition) or hunting (in the Buryat tradition).

In order to understand the plot-forming role of the motive in the Epos, it is important to take into account the basic thesis of the concept of E.M. Meletynsky, according to which “the structure of the motive can be compared with the structure of a sentence (judgment) and considered “as a one-act micro plot, which is based on action. The action in the motive is a predicate on which the actants – arguments depend on (agent, patient, etc.). Their number and character depend on the predicate.” (Meletinsky, 1994, p. 50, 64).

The prevailing position of the predicate in the epic narrative, expressed mainly from the descriptions of heroic events, allows taking as a basis the statement of E.M. Meletinsky when isolating the motive from the plot narrative of the epic of the Mongolian people (the hero goes on the road: by order of Khan, to bring a drove of horses and bring the flag of the Khan-antagonist; accepting the challenge of the antagonist-hero, hostile Khan, etc.). The importance of the predicate was also noted by Albert Lord: “the verbs denoting the most frequent actions in the narrative often complete the formula themselves” (Lord, 1994, p. 47).

The emphasis is put on the nuclear part of the motive “the hero goes on the road”, the motivation of sending the epic hero forms the variability of invariant. Consequently, for the epic of the Mongolian people, the invariant “bogatyrs sets out on the road” is an all-Mongolian nuclear invariant motive and its variants reflecting the specifics of the national epic, traditional for each individual epic tradition of Oirats).

Based on the above-mentioned aspects, when identifying and isolating a motive from an epic plot, the authors take into account the remark of B.N. Putilov regarding the structural and substantive independence of the motive (Putilov, 1988) and its motive properties as its “minimal, predicative, connection with the event”(Ershova, 2017).

During the course of the definition of the motive, due attention is drawn to the attachment of the motive to formula formations that are distinguished by constancy in the epic narrative of a particular tradition, in this case in national versions of the Epos of the Mongolian people (Buryat, Kalmyk, Mongol-Oirat, Khalkha-Mongol and Xinjiayn). These constant segments serve as a guideline in the process of the identification of traditional motive, since they reflect the stereotypes of the nomads' poetic thinking and reflect the nature of the mechanism of epic composition (Khabunova, 2016).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to study the motive composition of the archaic plot of the Epos of the Mongolian people about the heroic marriage, on the analysis of motives-invariants and motives-variants in the epos recorded in the last century and existing nowadays.

5. Research Methods

In order to identify the motive from the epic narrative, the theoretical positions of the works of Russian scientists in the field of the theory of motive (Veselovsky, Propp, Putilov, Meletynsky) were taken into account. These theoretical positions served as a basis for isolating the motive from the epic narrative with regard to its characterizing properties (“structural and substantive independence”, “minimal”, “Predicative”, “connection with the event”). The appeal to the theory of belles’ constants by V.M. Gatsak (Gatsak, 1967), to the composition theory of A. Lord and M. Perry made it possible to consider such an aspect as the attachment of a motive to formulaic formations that are distinguished by constancy in the epic narrative of a particular tradition. The methods of synoptic analysis of asynchronical recordings, which allow tracing the stability of the invariant motives in the Epos and the degree of preservation of traditional motives of the epic of the Mongolian people expressed in the variant motives.

6. Findings

Only the innovations, which correspond to the tradition, may penetrate into folklore. Otherwise, destructive actions take place in its development, leading to the extinction of the tradition and the disappearance of the folklore genre (Khabunova, 2016). Taking into account the structural and semantic properties of the motive, the authors turned to the analysis of the motive composition the Oirat-Mongolian epos “Boom Erdeni” (narrator Ts. Zodov) with an archaic plot about the heroic marriage. Having studied the motives in the sequence in which they occur in the epic plot, the authors were able to build a model consisting of a number of invariants of motives and motives - variants. The authors have identified 19 motives-invariants: 1. birth of a warrior, 2. cutting the umbilical cord, 3. rapid growth, 4. children's play 5. naming 6. erecting a palace for the warrior 7. finding a warrior 8. preparation of a bogatyr on the road 9. preparation of a bogatyr horse on the road, 10. receiving the news, 11. getting the task 12. Setting out to the journey 13. appearing in the khan's bet 14. participating in the marriage competitions 15. getting married 16. sending the way back, 17. the fight, 18. the destruction of an enemy, 19. the establishment of peace and prosperity. From these motives – invariants, a plot of the model is formed, on which the motives are applied, the number of which depends on the episodic skill of a performer of the Epos.

The nature and degree of mobility of motives-variants indicates the degree of preservation or deformation of the epic plot. The 19 motives that we identified as invariants ensured the compositional harmony and logical completeness of the ideological and semantic content of the epic narrative “Boom Erdeni” by the narrator Ts. Zodov. The result of the work of the narrator, who knows how to skillfully combine motives was the emergence of 52 motives-options.

Other variants formed around each motive-invariant. The following invariant motives turned out to be the most variable: 7. a warrior horse – 5 variant motives (the old herdler Ag Sakhhal finds a newly born foal; the herdsman determines his predestination for the bogatyr Boom Sayn Erdani; tests the horse,

identifies the horse; the horse is brought and tied sandalwood harness; praise the dignity of a horse); 13. appearance in the khan's bet of another country – 12 (the bogatyr compares himself and his horse with his rivals; presents himself and his horse; announces the goal of arrival; receives permission to participate in competitions; gains a bogatyr-assistant; with the bogatyr-assistant sets out to the journey, the warriors reach the Bogzatyń Bor Uul boundary mountain, the witch warns their opponent Mangas about the danger, two bogatyrs compete in combat to determine the superiority and smoke a pipe of consent, two bogatyrs become brothers); departure back – 8 (where the circle is marked, spend the night, where the line is drawn, continue the path; in the middle of the path the twin brother turns out of the way to visit his parents; the hero horse informs Boom Erdeny about the misfortunes of the twin hero; the hero hurries to help the hero – brother; bogatyrs meet, eat the meat of a half thousand red deer, moving along the trail of the herd, get to Khangai, make a fire, fry and eat meat of a half thousand horses, bogatyrs fall asleep; the herdsman takes the fire by the fire of spit, and two sleeping heroes – for dark mountains; herdsman tells about what he saw sons of Khan – antagonist); duel – 9 (warriors choose the type and weapon (bow and arrows) of confrontation; wrestling duel; ask defeated opponents about three regrets; learn about three regrets: three years have not passed after marriage, have not ridden horse Gobi, have not eaten horse meat for three years; dismembers and scatters the body of the enemy; enters a fight with other opponents; the bogatyr rises to the top of the mountain and causes healing rain; learns about the places of the opponents' soul; after destroying the enemy, dismembering the body, burning, leaving no smell, and scattering dissolved).

If the epic composition model is universal, then it is successfully used by narrators in the construction of other scenes, especially within the framework of a local tradition. In order to detect general patterns, the folklorist does not have to “take resolutely the entire ocean of material”, “the law becomes clear gradually”, and it may be advisable to study “parts of folklore material in order to obtain common, typical patterns” and, “if the law is correct, then it will be correct on any material, and not only on the one that is included” (Putilov, 1971). Therefore, we attached the model of the story-teller Ts. Zодov to the plot of another Oirat-Mongolian epos “Zhangar” (Uurtyn Ulan Hongr), recorded at different times in Uvsnursky aimak of Western Mongolia with different storytellers: Chogsomyn Baglay (recording 1940) and Nimun Ankhbair and tried to determine what the narrator excludes and preserves when he plays the epic.

As B.N. Putilov noted, the epic tradition can be preserved and developed if there are “special experts of the epos” in people’s environment, who are not limited to the knowledge of the texts and their performance, but who have “the art of playing the epos in its traditional forms” (Putilov, 1997, p.9). Using the example of a comparative analysis of the same motive-invariant “rapid growth of the hero” from the epos “Bum Erdeni” and “Zhangar” (Uourtyn U.Kh.), recorded at different times, we came to the following result: the rapid growth of the hero in different epics is transmitted by different poetic using stylistic means: “in a day, he eats a ram and does not fit in a diaper from one valuha, in two days he eats two sheep and does not fit in the diaper from two valuks, in ten days he eats ten sheep and does not fit in the diaper from ten and valukhs”(“Boom Erdeni” – Ts. Zодov); at the age of three, he conquered the possessions of three noyons (princes) and hoisted their flags at his own, at the age of four he conquered the possessions of four noyons and hoisted their flags at his own, at the age of seven he conquered the possessions of seven noyons and hoisted their flags at his own, acquired a formidable title. In the first case, the invariant motive characterizes the physical capabilities of a bogatyr groom, in the second – the heroic military qualities

intended to be the conqueror of other possessions and khans. It is necessary to add that in the asynchronical recordings (1940 and 2007) this motive is distinguished by the constancy of the text manifestation.

The application of the model which has been built by the authors to the plot of another epic, but recorded by different storytellers at different times, showed that the modern narrator does not deviate from the storyline, creatively using motives-invariants and weaving variants into the narrative essence of the epic narrative.

The study made it possible to create a model of a sequential arrangement of motives – invariants and motives-variants in the archaic plot of the epic of the Mongolian people about the heroic marriage. It was also possible to show that the motive – variant transmits the national specificity of the epos, its stadial and local features. The results of a comparative analysis suggest that in “only the innovations, which correspond to the tradition, penetrate into folklore. Otherwise, destructive actions take place in its development, leading to the extinction of tradition, the disappearance of the folklore genre” (Khabunova, 2016, p. 263-267).

7. Conclusion

To conclude with it is necessary to note that the study showed that in the epic narrative of modern performers of the Epos of the Mongolian people, the set of nuclear motives-invariants remains unchanged - this allows memorizing the plot outline of the epic and reproduce it in the required volume. Motives-variants that transmit the features (stadial, national, local) of the epic tradition are preserved, but their thematic composition is inferior to the diversity of the previous tradition. The modern performer of the Epos is able to preserve the canonical model of the epic plot, carefully handling the motive-formula composition of the epos, skillfully weaving them into the belles essence of the epic narrative, since the loss of stable structural elements cementing the text may ultimately lead to the loss of the national epos in live performance. The life of the epic of the Mongolian people can be extended using traditional forms of transmission of the epic heritage.

Acknowledgments

The research was performed with financial support of Russian Foundation for Basic Research and the Ministry of education, culture and science of Mongolia as a part of scientific project № 18-512-94006.

References

- Gatsak, V. (1967). *East Romance heroic epic. Study and texts*. Moscow: Science.
- Ershova, I. V. (2017). On the interpretation of the epic motive (problem statement). *New Philological Gazette*, 2 (41) 14–20.
- Lord, A. B. (1994). *Narrator*. Moscow: Eastern Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
- Khabunova, E. E. (2016). The institute of epic storytelling: the heritage of the Kalmyk Dzhangarchi and forecasts for the future. “Jangar” and the epic traditions of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples: problems of preservation and research. *Proceedings of the III International Scientific Conference dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences* (pp. 263– 267). Elista: KIGI RAS.
- Meletinsky, E. M. (1994). *About literary archetypes*. Moscow: RSUH.
- Putilov, B. N. (1971). *Russian and South Slavic heroic epos: Comparative-typological study*. Moscow.

- Putilov, B. N. (1975). *The motive as a plot-forming element Typological studies on folklore. Collection of articles in memory of V.Ya. Propp*. Moscow: Science.
- Putilov, B. N. (1988). Heroic epic and reality. L., Science.
- Putilov, B. N. (1997). *Epic storytelling: Typology and ethnic specificity*. Moscow: Eastern Literature, RAS.
- Propp, V. Ya. (1928). *The morphology of the tale*. Leningrad: Leningrad truth.
- Silantyev, I. V. (1999). *The theory of motive in Russian literary criticism and folklore studies: an essay on historiography*. Novosibirsk: IDMI.