

Comparative analysis of the introductory part of the contexture of Turkic epic tales (illustrated by the Yakut Olonkho and Shor epic)

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Abstract—The paper deals with heroic epics of the Yakut and Shor peoples. Our goal is to conduct comparative study the introductory part of the contexture of the olonkho of the northeastern Yakut tradition and Shor epic tales based on The 14 texts and stories of the olonkho of the Yakut north-eastern tradition and 3 texts of the Shor epic as narrated by storyteller V. E. Tannagashev. Basically, the contexture of Turkic epic tales consists of introduction, exposition, complications or development of the action, crisis or climax, denouement and final part. The olonkho of the Yakut northeastern tradition and the Shors epic tales are divided into three parts: introductory, main and final. The cosmogonic (foundational) principle which is a feature of archaic epics was not found in the introductory part of the olonkho of the tradition under study and the Shor epic tales. The introductory part of the Shor epic tales is notable for its short descriptions. These texts contain only description of nature, people and the golden palace where the protagonist lives. In contrast to the Shor epic tales, the introductory part of the olonkho of the northeastern tradition describes in detail the dwelling of the protagonist, backyard buildings, wealth, nature and the sacred tree named *Aal Luuk Mas*. Some olonkho of the northeast tradition tells the stories about the protagonist's dying. According to olonkhosut, these texts are incomplete, so such tragic denouement is not the end.

The comparative analysis of the plot contexture allows us to conclude that the olonkho of the northeastern Yakut tradition and the Shors epic tales are close to each other, but have special features. These peoples have family ties, which is probably why the epic tales of the related peoples arose at the intersection between their historical and spiritual contacts.

Keywords—epic tale, Yakut folklore, Shor folklore, Yakut olonkho, northeastern Yakut tradition, Shor epic tales, plot, composition, introduction, main part, conclusion

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, a key task for the Yakut epic sciences is to inquire into the Yakut heroic epic tale of olonkho through comparative studies of the Eurasian national epics and identification of their general patterns and specific features. This is the first attempt to compare the

northeastern Yakut traditions described in the olonkho and the Shor epics. The challenge we have set ourselves is to study the plot and contexture of olonkho texts of the northeastern Yakut tradition and Shor epics using structural-typological and comparative methods.

The first steps in studying the Turkic-Mongolian epic arts in historical, comparative and typological aspects were taken by I.V. Pukhov. In his work "*Heroic Epic of Altai and Sayan Peoples and Yakut Olonkhos*" [1], he compared the olonkho with the epic arts of Altai, Shor, Khakass peoples. Innokenty Vasilyevich, having examined the epics of the Yakuts and Shors, arrives at the following conclusions: "the Kan Kes Shor epic is similar to the Yakut olonkho in many details. The key similarities include: the initial loneliness of the main character who does not know his origin; the messenger coming to him as a bird; rudimental characteristics of his enemies – monsters – used in description of human beings, although that they might not be suitable for them; similar expression the character's desire to return home, immortality and cruelty of the enemy, as well as epithets; prediction of the flow of events that have not yet happened, but which will certainly happen. All this shows that the Kan Kes Shor epic undoubtedly has common origins with the Yakut olonkho" [1]. The scholar concludes that the Yakut and Shor epics have common sources.

In his article titled *The Yakut Heroic Epic Olonkho in the Context of Comparative Study* [2] Professor V. N. Ivanov raises the question regarding the need for the comparative study of the olonkho in the light of development of modern epic sciences.

The professor emphasizes that "broadening and deepening the comparative studies of the Yakut epic tale will enrich the theoretical studies of the common Turkic epic with new facts and arguments, and will introduce new monuments of the Yakut epic heritage into the Yakut epic studies, which will allow to capture not only specific, but also common features with other epic arts. Only in this case, we can fully discuss the contribution of

the Yakut people to the epic vector of world cultural development”.

II. BACKGROUND MATERIALS

There are three traditions of epic story telling that represent the main areas in which the events of the Yakut olonkho take place: central, Viliui and northern. The northern epic tradition consists of northeastern and northwestern epic traditions. The north-eastern tradition includes traditions that have developed in Momsky, Abyysky, Verkhoyansky and Srednekolymsky uluses (districts). The study was based on 14 olonkho texts and stories of the tradition under study. For the first time, folklore of the northern uluses was studied by I.A. Khudyakov. In 1890, the Verkhoyansk Collection [3] containing the full version of olonkho about *Khan Jargystai (Khan Djargystai)* recorded after unknown narrator. In 1939-1941, S. I. Bolo and A.A. Savvin, the members of the Institute of Languages and Culture (now the Institute for Humanities Research and Indigenous Studies of the North (IHRISN), Siberian Branch), during their folklore expedition to the northern regions, recorded the olonkho texts of the Momsky epic tradition – *Kyotyor Myulgyun (Көтөр Мүлгүн)* as narrated by olonkhosut (olonko-teller) D.M. Sleptsov and *Khaarylla Mokhsogol (Хаарылла Мохсоҕол)* as narrated by V.V. Atlasov – and an olonkho text of the Abyysky epic tradition - *Eris khallaan uola Er Sogotokh (Эрис халлаан уола Эр Соҕотох)* as narrated by G.F. Nikulin – Khabytt. During the Second World War, folklore specialist G.M. Vasilyev recorded the entire text of *Alyp Khara ikki, Tuigong ikki* and plots of *Ereideekh-buruudaakh Er Sogotokh*. In 1945-1946, D.G. Zhirkov had folklore expedition in the Srednekolymski ulus and recorded three olonkho texts of the Srednekolymsky epic tradition: *Mas Batyia* as narrated by P.N. Nazarova, *Erbekkh uyuse bieste ergiybit Erbekhchin Mergen (Эрбэх үүһэ биэстэ эргийбит Эрбэхчин Мэргэн)* as narrated by I.V. Okoneshnikov and *Kyn Myongyuryu-yon ogonnjor ikki, Kyn Reigel emeekhsin ikki («Күн Мөнгүрүүн оҕонньор икки, Күн Тэйгэл эмээхсин икки»)* as narrated by E.V. Laptsev. The text of *Yus uollaakh Labangkhachaan ogonnjor (Үс уоллаах Лабангхачаан оҕонньор)* as presented by K.N. Tretyakov–Choochui was also recorded, but it is unknown when and by whom. The manuscript author left only his last name - Sleptsov. In 1953, the olonkho texts of the Verkhoyansky epic tradition, *Aalya Bergen bukhatyur* [4] as narrated by K.Kh. Ammosov, was recorded. In 1984-1987, participants of the expedition managed to make and transcript audio records of several olonkhos retold by D.A. Tomskaya – *Erbeher erchimneekh Eliter Bergen (Эрбэһэр эрчимнээх Элитэр Бэргэн), Kyomyus Myokuyulykeen old man, Elgeen Ieieksit old woman (Көмүс Мөкүлүкээн оҕонньор, Элгээн Иэйэхсит эмээхсин)* and *Khaan Ilbisteen Vaatyur*. In 1987, participants of folk expedition audio-recorded the olonkho called *Yuchyugei Yuyodzhyugyueen, Kusagan Khodjugur («Үчүгэй Үйүдзһүгүуеен, Кусаган Ходжугур* («Үчүгэй

Үөдүүгүйээн, Куһаҕан Ходьугур») as narrated by D.A. Tomskaya [5].

The first Shor language texts and folk literary works date back to the second half of the 19th century. In 1828, the Altai Orthodox Mission was established. The task assigned to the Mission by the Czar’s government was to Christianize the Altai tribes.

To be able to discover the secrets of the religious outlook of the peoples of the North and to combat shamanism, the missionaries began to study folklore. The first literary works of the Shor folklore (heroic epics) were included in the first volume of the work by academician V.V. Radlov entitled *Samples of the Folk Literature of Turkic Tribes*. Some records are included in the *Report on a Business Trip of Sergei Efimovich Malov, a Student of the Oriental Department* [6].

Before the Russian Revolution of 1917, all works of Shor arts were oral. In 1925-1932, N.P. Dyrenkova organized a folklore expedition in the Gorno-Shorsk region and collected diverse texts of the Shor folklore: heroic poems, tales, legends and stories, proverbs, riddles and songs. In 1940, *The Shor Folklore* [6] collected by N. P. Dyrenkova was published.

From 1995 to 2003 a folklore expedition headed by L. N. Arbachakova worked with Shor storytellers. During a series of field studies in the northern regions of Shoria, the participants succeeded to record about 32 heroic legends consisting of 1.500 to 3.000 verse lines retold by representatives of the Mrassky storytelling school (A. V. Ryzhkina, V. E. Tannagashev, A. P. Napazakov) [7].

Professor D. A. Funk worked closely with the Shor storytellers. He issued the series of publications named *The Shor Heroic Epic*. The first volume of this series was published in 2010. The materials being studied were the Shor epic texts: *Sybazyn-Olak, The Quarrelsome Altyn-Torgu* and *Kara-Khan* from the storyteller V. E. Tannagashev edited by D. A. Funk.

V.E. Tannagashev first heard these folk tales from the outstanding Shor kai-chi story-teller P.N. Amzorov (1898-1971) in the 1950s when he was about 18 years old. That year V. E. Tannagashev managed to put on paper 16 epic texts that were included in the 3rd volume of *The Shor Heroic Epic* series [8].

III. STUDY OF THE PLOT AND CONTEXTURE OF THE EPICS OF THE TURKIC PEOPLES OF SIBERIA

According to S. S. Surazakov, the Altaic folk tales have the following plot basis: at the beginning a folk tale describes the life of the protagonist (introduction). Then follows the starting point - the bogatyr (a term applied to warriors in ancient epic folk stories) goes on a hunt. The scholar believes that the fact that a wife or sister of the protagonist disobeys his command is a very important element of the story. The final episode of the tale is the punishment of the protagonist above the cheater (wife or

sister). Not every epic tale says that the protagonist gets married [9].

S. M. Katashev has revealed that the Ataic folk tales may have one or several narrative strands. The single-strand tales are based on the conflict of two opposing characters, and tell about one bogatyr. Multi-strand epic tales were more common in the Altai.

Based on the materials collected by S.M. Orus-ool [10], the Tuvan myths and legends are composed of several parts: exposition (build-up) that describes the time when the epic takes place, and the camping area, wealth, livestock, property, horse, battle armor, weapons, lifestyle and appearance of the protagonist; introduction or reason for which the protagonist has to leave his camping area followed by overcoming obstacles, a heroic trip for a bride and homecoming; crisis (bogatyr's competition) and denouement describes his return of the camping area, and peaceful and happy life there. The studier thinks that all Tuvan myths and legends have the same contexture. S. M. Orus-ool distinguishes three types of account of events in the Tuvan heroic epic tradition. The first type includes the epic tales that describe the life of the bogatyr of three generations.

This storyline consists of three parts, and each part is an account of events that took place in life if each character. The second type is represented by two-part legends about the bogatyr of two generations. The third type myths and legends tell about the life of one character and consist of one part (sometimes two internal parts) [10].

The Khakass heroic epics are composed of exposition (description of the time of the creation, possessions and wealth of the character, and place settings), introduction (reason for which the protagonist has to leave his camping area), complications (story of his heroic deeds, overcoming obstacles, and a trip for a bride), crisis (the main bogatyr's competition and the victory of the protagonist) and denouement (his final homecoming together with his bride, and their peaceful and happy life) [11].

N. S. Tchistobaeva, who has supported the theory of S. M. Orus-ool, believes that there are three types of narration in the Khakass mythology: folk tales about heroes of one generation; legends about the heroes of two generations; and sagas about heroes of three generations, "where each hero is the protagonist of separate account of events which consists of the main traditional parts" [11].

D. A. Funk in the study of the Shor heroic epics uses the term "roads". He affirms that "the Shor people have very few folk tales about "one road" ... Large-scale epics, as a rule, tell about a big number of "roads" and a big number of generations" [8]. Maybe under the notion "road" he means a narrative type. For example, the trail that the hero hits in the introduction can be called "road". He launches a heroic quest – that's a road.

The contexture of the Yakut olonkho was first analyzed by G.U. Ergis [12]. He points to the existence of a certain well-established tradition of compiling olonkho text with enormous diversity and richness of plots. The folklorist refers to the beginning of olonkho as "introduction" or "prologue". The introduction, which opens every olonkho, tells in detail about the hero's homeland, gives wonderful descriptions of nature, and characterizes the hero's background (or his destiny), appearance, patrimonial relations, daily round and wealth (home, movable and immovable property). It is followed by the build-up in which the quiet life of the Aiyg Aimaga tribe is destroyed by the Abaasy demon who attacks the peaceful tribesmen of the protagonist.

The next stage is complications: the bogatyr protects the offended people, saves the abducted beauties, and takes revenge for people's tears and ruin. In the epilogue, according to the classification proposed by G.W. Ergis, the series of events ends with a description of the wedding feast of the protagonist and the beginning of a lengthy period of peaceful and prosperous life.

As noted earlier, I. V. Pukhov [13] deepened the olonkho contexture proposed by his predecessor. He not only divided the introduction into descriptive and narrative parts, but also for the first time introduced the concept of exposition, which describes the origin of the Universe and the Middle World, and tells the story of about the first people and ancestors of the tribe, their glorious and hard days. Then follow the complications (the folklorist does not include the build-up in the plot contexture, and therefore, the complications immediately follow the exposition).

A separate part of the plot is the climax or tag line which includes the triumphant end to the heroic deeds. At the crisis stage, all actions come to an end. The final part of the olonkho describes a nationwide festival - Ysyakh, a feast at which the hero (protagonist) is honored.

N.V. Emelyanov [14-17], along with I.V. Pukhov, applies the definition "exposition" and introduces a new definition "epic introduction" followed by the build-up, like G.W. Ergis proposed.

To differentiate the next component of the plot, he introduces a new element of the contexture - "the olonkho narrative arc" or "the development of the action" (instead of the "complications" proposed by G.W. Ergis). Next is the crisis (under the influence of I. V. Pukhov, who used the expression "climax" in describing the contexture of the olonkho). Besides, N.V. Emelyanov was the first to put to use "further development of the action" to describe the significant events in the life of the protagonist (meeting with his brother, going for a bride or heroic matchmaking) and "olonkho" - the denouement of the plot. The olonkho plot ends with denouement (the marriage of the protagonist, and homecoming).

Thus, we can state that all folklorists and olonkho studiers are unanimous in their assessment that the

Turkic epics have the similar contexture comprised of introduction, exposition (build-up), crisis or climax, denouement and the final part. Therefore, all plots of the Yakut olonkho and Shor epic tales can be divided into three parts: introductory, main and final.

IV. INTRODUCTORY PART

Let's review the introductions of the Shor epic tales *Sybazyn-Olak*, *The Quarrelsome Altyn-Torgu* and *Kara-Khan*. The introductory part of *The Quarrelsome Altyn-Torgu* tells the story of the creation of the Middle World:

Before the current generation,

And after the old generation,

When the earth was created

When the ground fought with water,

When the earth was divided with the help of a stirrer,

When the water was shared with the help of a scoop,
it appears that there was a time ... [8].

This passage describes the epic time when the Earth, the Middle World, was created. In other two texts, *Sybazyn-Olak* and *Kara-Khan*, the creation of the earth is recounted similarly. Further, *The Quarrelsome Altyn-Torgu*, provides description of the world where the main characters live:

White taiga is standing on top with a cross,

At the foot of the white taiga

The White Sea flows, it turns out.

Along the White Sea

A motley white cattle is, it turns out,

Countless people live, it turns out ... [8].

In this country there is a white taiga and a white sea, on the banks of which white cattle graze, and countless people live. The epic *Sybazyn-Olak* depicts a country in which there are a green taiga and a blue sea. In another epic tale, the protagonist Kara-Khan lives in the country which has the black taiga and the black sea. The main characters of the Shor epic live in a golden palace, which stands on the seashore. In front of the golden palace there is a golden horse stall, to which the bogatyr's horse is tied. Therefore, the introductory part of the Shor epic is the same, at least, in the terms of creation of the middle world and description of the land where the main characters live. It refers to taiga, sea, livestock and people living on this earth. There is a golden palace with a golden horse stall. Thus, we can get acquainted with the land, wealth and people among which of the main characters of the Shor epic live.

The introductory part of the olonkho texts of the Yakut north-eastern tradition can be differentiated as narrative and descriptive parts.

The narrative part describes the stories of lonely heroes who have neither a father nor mother, none of relatives. For example, in the text of the olonkho *Kyotyor Myulgyun* (Көтөр Мүлгүн) [18] of the Momsky epic tradition, the protagonist does not know where he is, as well as where and when he was born. In this part, in addition to the story about the "Lone Ranger", there are stories about the hero and his relatives. In the olonkho named *Yus balystaah Labankhachaan Labangha* [19] the main protagonist lives with three sisters. However, they do not know anything about their relatives, as well as where they came from and how they appeared in the middle world. In the introduction of some olonkho texts, there are stories of the main characters living together with their brothers.

The story of the protagonist's life with his brother is presented in the olonkho *Yugyugey Yuyugyugyueen, Kusagan Khojugur* [5] of the Verkhoyansky epic tradition. In this text, the protagonist Yugyugei Yuyudyeen lives with his brother Kusagan Khojugur. The descriptive part includes detailed description of their dwellings, including interior design. There are references to backyard buildings: hedges, barns and a ritual horse stall - *serge*. What follows is a description of the nature of the Middle World: mountains, ponds, meadows, river valleys, trees and herbs, including the shrubs that grow only in rocky terrain. In this description the shrubs and larches are most characteristic. An important part in the description of the Middle World is the image of the sacred tree, as the sacred larch is the overriding characteristic of the olonkho tradition under study.

If we compare the introductory part of the Yakut and Shor epic tales, we can draw the conclusions that both epics have not yet developed the cosmogonic principle which is a feature of the archaic epic.

In the northeastern olonkho the protagonist does not know his relatives and is the first person on the Earth, whereas the Shor epic tales do not mention the origin of the main characters at all.

For example, in the epic tale named *Kara-Khan* tells only that Kara-Khan and his wife live in a golden palace. There is no information about where the khan came from, who his parents are, etc. The olonkho of the studied tradition contains very detailed description of his dwelling, including interior decoration and backyards. In addition, it depicts the area where the main character lives: the beautiful northern nature, its forests, rivers and lakes. In the Shor epic tales, such detailed and wide descriptions of home, nature and wealth of the main characters are not found. They describe the taiga, sea, cattle and countless people, as well as the golden palace where the protagonist [8].

The characteristic feature of the olonkho of the tradition under study is the image of the sacred tree *Aal Luuk Mas*. In the Shor epic, presented in our study by three texts of *Sybazyn-Olak*, *The Quarrelsome Altyn-*

Torgu and *Kara-Khan*, no world's sacred tree is mentioned or described.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, the comparative analysis of the introductory part of the contexture of the *olonkho* of the Yakut northeastern and *Shor* epic tales suggests the following conclusions. The introductory part of the Yakut *olonkho* and the *Shor* epic has the same structure. All texts at the beginning describe the epic time, nature and life of the characters. Contrary to the *Shor* epic tales, the *olonkho* of the northeastern tradition of entry narrates more about the life of the protagonist and nature. The *olonkho* of the northeastern Yakut tradition has simple, complex or complete contexture. Thus, the plots of the Yakut and *Shor* epic tales are close to each other, but have special features. Similar plots and motives of epics can be explained by the fact that the Yakuts and *Shors* belong to the Turkic peoples and have family ties, which is probably why the epics of the related peoples arose at the intersection of their historical and spiritual contacts. In the future, it seems promising to study the figurative language (imageries) of the *olonkho* of the north-eastern Yakut tradition and *Shor* epics, as well as to compare the heroic epic tales of the *Shor* people and the Yakut *olonkho*.

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