

## SYMBOLS OF ORNITHOLOGICAL IMAGES IN ALTAI HEROIC EPICS

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### Abstract

This work is carried out within the framework of linguoculturology. The object of the research is the symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics, while the subject of the study is their symbolic characteristics in the linguoculture of the Altai people.

The relevance of the research is determined by the following points: 1) symbolic images in Altai heroic epics play an important role in the linguistic worldview of the Altai people, 2) birds are among the frequent symbols of linguoculture, yet the systematization of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics from a symbolic perspective is still insufficiently reflected in linguistic literature, 3) understanding the symbolic ornithological images in Altai heroic epics contributes to successful intercultural communication.

The following hypothesis forms the basis of this research: symbolic ornithological images in Altai heroic epics constitute part of the linguistic worldview of the Altai people; they fall into certain classes, and their associative features reflect important characteristics of human behavior.

**Keywords:** Altai language, symbols, ornithological image, heroic epic, ethnospecific features, human, semantic motivation, linguoculture.

### For citation

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### 1. Introduction

The Altai language is the language of the indigenous inhabitants of the Altai Republic. It consists of two groups – southern and northern, each characterized by phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features. Each group, in the process of its development, has preserved general features distinguishing the northern group from the southern, as well as more particular and minor divergences within each group.

These two groups, complex in their ethnic composition, differ both in the degree of genetic connection with ancient Uighur tribes and in linguistic relations with ancient Turkic languages. Thus, in the ancient Turkic era, part of the ancestors of modern Altai people belonged to the ancient Yenisei Kyrgyz (southern Altaians), and part to Uighur and Oghuz tribes (northern Altaians). While the language of the southern Altaians, preserving the ancient Kyrgyz base,

later underwent Kipchak influence, the northern group retained more features of ancient Turkic languages. In the northern group, historical connections with ancient Samoyedic and Ket-speaking tribes, who underwent Turkification in the ancient Turkic era, can also be traced. The commonality of the Altai language with the language of the Yenisei-Orkhon and Uighur monuments of the 7th–8th centuries can be discovered through the analysis of phenomena preserved in the phonetic structure, grammatical system, and vocabulary of the modern Altai language.

The study of symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics seems relevant, as Turkology lacks special research on this topic. Individual symbols are reflected in the articles by N.A. Yaimova [1990] and M.M. Sazankin [1998].

For a symbol, imagery is primarily characteristic. It is asserted that a symbol is a concept related to an image, which is why researchers often speak of symbolic images. According to S.S. Averintsev, the objective image and the deep meaning are considered as two poles constituting the structure of a symbol, which cannot exist separately from each other. "Without an image, the deep meaning loses its manifestation. Without the deep meaning, the tension of the image, in which the essence of the symbol lies, disintegrates" [Averintsev, 1968]. In other words, a symbol represents a bilateral unity of the material and spiritual worlds. Noting that "imagery" is the most important property of a symbol, it is necessary to agree with N.N. Rubtsov's opinion that "a symbol is a certain manifestation of an image. Imagery is the 'material body' of the symbol" [Rubtsov, 1991, p.23]. Many researchers note the figurative nature of the symbol [Arutyunova, 1990; Averintsev, 1968; Bragina, 1979; Gak, 1988; Gura, 1997; Gachev, 1998; Sverepo, 2004; Losev, 1991; Rubtsov, 1991; Shelestyuk, 1998; Fedoseeva, 2015; Demchenko, 2019] and assert that a symbol "grows" out of an image, a symbol manifests itself as an image of high value.

In a broad sense, due to the ability to copy the real world, we can also call imagery iconicity, which determines the corresponding choice of abstract ideas for symbolizing objects.

In linguoculturology, a symbol acts as an image of high value significance [Losev, 1995; Averintsev, 1983; Karasik, 2019], allowing for multiple interpretations, as a means of adequately translating the plane of expression into the plane of content [Krasnykh, 2007], as a conventional sign [Akhmanova, 2004], containing encrypted ethnolinguocultural information and conveying the value-semantic nature of ethno-linguistic consciousness [Zagidullina, 2000].

## **2. Problem Statement**

A comprehensive study of the symbol in a linguocultural aspect makes it possible to reveal its essence, characteristics, and features of functioning as an integral part of linguoculturology.

Altai heroic epics feature huge mythical birds, for example, Kan-Keredé. Similar plots with mythical birds are found in many other Turkic folklore works. For instance, in Khakas culture, myths about birds, in which birds are likened to people, are widely represented. Among the Teleuts, the eagle is called the master of the sky, the companion and helper of the shaman. V.Ya. Propp notes that mythological consciousness transfers the social structure and normative relations, once existing in society, onto the "bird world." Individual species of birds were considered clans and tribes, and their association – a union of the bird tribe [Propp, 1946, p. 15]. In the oral folk art of the Yakuts, there are myths according to which the eagle and other

birds are recognized as patron deities of people [Alekseev, 1994, pp. 55-58]. Also, Yakuts believe that shamans are descendants of golden eagles [Korogly, 1986, p. 95].

The cult of the eagle is one of the most universal, found among different peoples, even those most distant from each other [Shternberg, 1936, p.112]. These birds were totems of some Siberian tribes. For example, among the Altai people, the revered bird-totem of the Irkit, Mayman, Mundus clans is the *golden eagle, eagle*. The names of some Altai clans are identified with the name of the eagle-golden eagle (mürküt). Thus, among the Altai people, there are clans "Mürküt," "Merkit." N.A. Yaimova writes that representatives of the Merkit clan among the Teleuts believed that they descended from an eagle or golden eagle, which they considered sacred birds and never killed [Yaimova, 1990, p.169]. The taboo – not to kill an eagle, a golden eagle – speaks of the significance of these birds among the Altai people [Shternberg, 1936, p.119]. Another one of the most common characters in heroic epics, occupying an important place in the worldview and culture of the Altai people, is the bird – eagle. Researchers note its heavenly origin.

In this article, the symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics are investigated for the first time.

### 3. Research Questions

The symbol of a *bird* is widely used in artistic texts. The lexeme *kush "bird"* itself appears in different meanings. In most cases, this symbol is used with a comparative meaning.

In the heroic epics of the Altai people, besides eagles, the mythical bird Kan-Kerede possesses enormous size and powerful strength. The wind blows from the flapping of its wings, rain falls from its tears. In this work, under the term "eagle," all falconiformes representatives of the eagle family are understood. In folklore works and ethnographic literature, these birds (eagle, golden eagle, falcon, etc.) are not always clearly differentiated.

Altai epics depict heroes who stand guard over their native land, selflessly devoted to their people, and the hero's helpers are his devoted friend the horse, faithful dogs, and birds: eagles, golden eagles. The eagle's closeness to the sky predetermined its guardian function – it sits near the palace doors. These birds were considered a connecting link between people and the upper world [Oinoshev, 2006, p. 99]. They are fast as lightning, as the wind. It should be noted that the eagle in Altai heroic epics is endowed with positive qualities. In the heroic epic "Maaday Kara," two black golden eagles guard the Altai (land) of the hero Maaday-Kara:

Üch tengeri ol tübile / Under three heavens they [two black golden eagles]

Ay kanattu kush ötkürbes, / Do not let moon-winged birds pass,

Üch Altaydın ol sıryla / Across three Altai they

Ayyr sandu ang ötkürbes. / Do not let four-legged animals pass.

Tengeri tübi tozuuchyzy, / Guarding the depth of the sky,

Eki kara ol mürküdüm / These two black golden eagles of mine.

Temir terek tal ortogo / On the iron poplar tree

Uyalanyp, shakshyp edip ol otturdu. / Having built a nest, screeching, they sit.

Alyp keler alyş jolyn angday bergen alyp ne proshli, / Guarding so that heroes do not pass by unknown paths,

Kezer keler kezem jolyn tozyy bergen / Guarding so that heroes do not pass by narrow paths.

Altay üsti tozuuchyzy / Guarding the land of Altai,

Emdi bolboy bu kanaytty / Such, it turns out, they are.  
[Maaday-Kara, 1973, p. 253].

Eagles choose the largest tree, in this case an iron poplar, from where absolutely everything is visible. They guard the Earth-Altai of the hero, not letting anyone or anything near. The birds act as active helpers of the hero in the fight against opponents and monsters.

In the heroic epics "Maaday-Kara," "Alyp-Ma-nash," "Altay-Buuchay," "Kögütey," "Solotoy Mergen," images of giant birds (Kan-Kerede, Mürküt, etc.) are created. These are eagles, golden eagles, with huge large wings, sharp claws, large beaks, possessing extraordinary strength, capable of carrying a person on their back from one place to another. The narrator endows them with reason: the birds understand human speech and can talk. The analysis of the heroic epic shows that birds perform various functions: they are messengers between the main characters, they are symbols of the upper world. The eagle flies higher and longer than all other birds; it has always been closer to the sky than all other birds. Eagles prefer to be in the air almost all the time, building nests on the highest trees. This probably served as the reason for them being called "heavenly birds." There is an opinion that birds previously served as objects of sacrifice, later replaced by other animals. But the role of mediators remained with them – they serve as messengers from the upper world. Furthermore, they act as messengers between khagans [Oinoshev, 2006, p. 100].

Birds can warn their owner of danger and save heroes from death. In the heroic epic "Maaday-Kara," when Kara-Kula kaan arrived with war on the land of the hero Maaday-Kara, two black golden eagles try to inform the hero of the danger, thereby helping Maaday-Kara prepare to meet the opponent:

Eki tüngey kara mürküt / Two identical black golden eagles  
Ün alyzha berbey kaytty. / Began to screech [anxiously] together.

[Maaday-Kara, 1973, p. 275].

In another heroic epic "Altay-Buuchay" (a version performed by N. Ulagashev), the hero's helpers were two gray falcons, who saved the hero and his son by finding the missing legs, hidden by Aranay and Sharanay. And in another version of the epic "Altay-Buuchay" (performed by A. Kalkin), two gray golden eagles help the horse revive the hero by stealing the missing thumbs and eyes from Aranay and Sharanay. The epics often use a metaphor illustrating the phenomenon of shapeshifting of these birds with their characteristic modes of movement. In heroic epics, eagles can transform into other birds to help their friend:

Eki tüngey boro mürküt / Two identical gray golden eagles  
Eki tüngey köktiyek bolup, / Turned into two sparrows,  
Jemzep-yüreten kushtar bolup, / As if in search of food,  
Jüs budaktu möngkü terek / Under the hundred-branched eternal poplar  
Bu tözine tüzüp alyp / Having flown, descended.  
Ancha-myncha bu Jürele, / Jumping around a bit,  
Eki ergekti birüzi onyn albay kaytty / One of them grabbed two thumbs.

...

Eki le kösti birüzi le emdi alyp, / The other now grabbed two eyes,

Kök bulutka bu kömü-lip, / Diving into the blue clouds,  
Ak bulutka bu jajynyp, ucha la berdi. / Hiding in the white clouds, flew away.  
[Altay baatyrlar, 2013, pp. 139-141].

Often, a horse in Altai heroic epics turns into an eagle. Apparently, the symbol of the horse-bird is connected with an archaic cult. The symbol of the horse combines with the image of the eagle and is also associated with the sky. An idealized image of eagles is characteristic of heroic epics. In the epic "Maaday-Kara," eagles have moon-like wings, sharp claws similar to diamonds:

Yeti üyeli temir tal ortodo / In the middle of the seven-knotted iron poplar tree  
Eki tüngey kara mürküt bar boluptyr, / Two identical black golden eagles sit,  
Tyrmaktary almys keptü, / Their claws [are sharp] like those of an almys,  
Tynystary salkyn keptü / Their breath is like the wind.  
Ay kanady ak buluttyy / With moon-like wings, resembling white clouds,  
Eki kara bu mürküdü / My two black golden eagles.

[Maaday-Kara, 1973, p. 253].

In the heroic epic "Solotoy Mergen," the bird Kan-Kerede carries the hero with his horse and his horses on its back, and in the epic "Kögütey," the flapping of Kan-Kerede's wings caused the wind to blow, and rain to drip from its tears.

Another interesting point is that in Altai fairy tales, birds hold a gathering where they elect the bird king – the eagle. A similar plot is found in Khakas myths: all birds, gathering, hold a meeting – "khustar chylü." At this meeting, the bird king – the eagle – is elected.

Чьи когти сильнее  
Кто крепче в крыльях? –  
И в полном согласье  
На царский престол  
Был птицами избран  
Могучий орёл [Kil'chichekov, 1995, p. 11].

(Whose claws are stronger  
Who is stronger in wings? –  
And in full agreement  
To the royal throne  
The birds elected  
The mighty eagle).

They choose the eagle as the strongest and most fearless of all the gathered birds. In some fairy tales, it appears as the fairest bird, which can resolve a dispute and punish the guilty [Altayskie skazki, 1996, pp. 74-76; Altayskie skazki, 1974, p. 45]. Thus, in the Altai fairy tale "How the Golden Eagle Punished the Heron," the golden eagle gathered a great assembly, where he instructed all birds where to build their nests and where to fly. Thus, each bird knows its place. And the disobedient heron, who was five days late to the assembly, was punished. The golden eagle grabbed the heron by the crown and shook it so that the feathers on its head stood up as

a crest. Since then and to this day, the heron has a crest on its head. Birds in myths and fairy tales are completely likened to people. Their way of life, relationships among themselves, as in human society. The royal nature of the eagle is largely determined by its natural characteristics. The eagle as a majestic symbol is depicted on the coats of arms and emblems of many states. The image of the eagle is inextricably linked with the cult of Heaven. In mythology, this bird is endowed with sacred characteristics. After all, they stand out among all birds with their biological properties. Among birds, the eagle is considered the most powerful with exceptional vision. As early as V.V. Radlov, traveling through Altai, wrote:

«Птицы небесные, пять меркутов,  
Вы, с мощными когтями,  
Из меди коготь, словно месяц,  
Мощен размах широких крыльев,  
Подобен вееру длинный хвост,  
И из железа клюв, словно месяц.  
Левое крыло закрывает месяц  
А правое крыло – солнце...» [Radlov, 1989, p. 380].

("Heavenly birds, five merkuts,  
You, with powerful claws,  
A claw of copper, like the moon,  
Powerful is the sweep of broad wings,  
The long tail is like a fan,  
And the beak of iron, like the moon.  
The left wing covers the moon  
And the right wing - the sun...").

The notable biological properties of these birds, which found vivid reflection in myths and ritual practice.

The presence of the eagle cult among the Altai and other Turkic peoples speaks of ethnic interconnections. The archaic ancestor cult has been preserved in ideas about totems: about the eagle, golden eagle among some Siberian tribes. For many peoples, the eagle was a symbol of heavenly (solar) power, the swiftness of fire and lightning.

The place and role of the eagle in oral folk art illustrate the worldview of the Altai population about the traditional mythological picture of the world.

### **Cuckoo (küük) – Herald of Summer**

In this work, we consider the image of the cuckoo in the oral art of the Altai people. The cuckoo in Altai folklore mainly symbolizes loneliness, which is apparently connected with its lack of children. Myths say that during a great festival arranged by God, the cuckoo was hatching its chicks. Therefore, God cursed it:

- Sen mening bayramyma kelbegen bolzong, sen emdi kachan da balangdy boyyng azyrabas bol! / Since you couldn't come to my festival, you will never feed your chicks yourself! [Neskazochnaya proza, 2011, pp. 166-167]. Thus, the cuckoo remained lonely for life and lays its eggs in others' nests.

Altai folklore reflects ideas about its human nature, i.e., the transformation of a girl (woman) into a cuckoo. In the house of the daughter-in-law, there lived an orphan girl. Her brother disappeared. The girl turns into a cuckoo and flies away to search for her brother. Along the way, one of her shoes falls off, since then the cuckoo has one foot without a shoe. She sits on the tree under which her brother died and cuckoos [Altay kep-kuuchındar, 1994, p. 355; Neskazochnaya proza, 2011, p.164]. In this myth, the cuckoo is a young girl.

According to legends that we managed to record, a woman who was offended by her disobedient children becomes a cuckoo. Once, when a woman became very ill and could not get up, she asked her children to bring her water to drink; they did not obey and went to play. Then she turned into a cuckoo and flew out through the chimney. The children tried to catch her by the feet, but only one shoe remained in their hand, which is why the cuckoo has one red leg and the other black. This legend explains why the cuckoo has different legs.

In Altai heroic epics, the cuckoo acts as a resurrector, sometimes as a herald of death, i.e., it is both a positive and a negative character. It can serve the hero's enemy or be a heavenly messenger. In the heroic epic, the cuckoo also appears as a benefactor of people. It symbolizes this, being a herald of summer [Oinoshev, 2006, p. 107]. Apparently, such an image is connected with the people's dream of eternal well-being, eternal youth (the theme of many folk tales). In Buryat uligers, the cuckoo is the patroness of heroes, performs resurrection functions, and is a symbol of well-being and youth [Kuz'mina, 1980, p. 159].

According to Bashkir legends, a girl who endlessly yearns for her beloved becomes a cuckoo. In very ancient times, on the southern slopes of the Ural-tau, a Bashkir tribe lived. It was often attacked by neighboring tribes. They attacked then too. That Bashkir tribe had a batyr named Käkuk. Leaving to fight, he told his beloved Karagash: "If I remain lying in the field, then red flowers will grow from my blood. They will remind you of my love. Believe: if I myself do not return, my name will return!"... When the battle subsided, there was not a single living soul left on the battlefield. Only Karagash did not want to believe this news. She wept bitterly, sang sad songs, remembering Käkuk. "If only I could fly to you as a bird!" she sobbed. And suddenly she began to shrink, to melt. Instead of hands, she grew wings. Having turned into a bird, flying from tree to tree, from mountain to mountain, she began to call her beloved: Käk-kuk! Käk-kuk! And once, after tiring searches, she saw dazzling red flowers. Only then did she believe in Käkuk's death. Since then, she flies around the world, if she lays an egg, she doesn't have the patience to hatch it – she is always looking for Käkuk. She calls especially plaintively during the time of red flowers blooming, and when the flowers wither, no longer able to cuckoo, she flies away somewhere far again in search of red flowers. People began to call this bird Käkuk – the cuckoo, and the red flowers – käkuk säs-kähe – cuckoo flowers [Yuldybaeva, 2012, pp. 154-56]. Among the Altai people, there are also flowers called kükting chechegi / cuckoo flowers.

Among the people, the cuckoo is perceived as a heavenly messenger, announcing the arrival of summer. There is a belief: if a person hears the first cuckooing of the year with the right ear, luck will accompany him; if with the left – there will be no luck. A person's fate for the year depends on how they hear the cuckoo's song in spring for the first time. Hearing the song from the front – the year will be good for them. If the song sounded from the right – the year will also be not bad. If from the left – the year will be unfavorable. If a person hears the cuckooing from the back of the head – misfortune should be expected [Oinoshev, 2006, p. 107]. When a

cuckoo cuckoos near a dwelling, it foretells misfortune, death of a person (see appendix about the cuckoo). When a cuckoo sits on a hitching post or on the very top of an ail and cuckoos – expect trouble, misfortune. V.A. Muytueva notes that according to the religious worldview of the Altai people, the cuckoo can predict death or misfortune to a person who is near it in the evening [Muytueva, 2004, p. 151]. There is a belief (borrowed from Russian folklore) that a cuckoo can predict lifespan. For this, they addressed the bird with the question: "Cuckoo, how many more years do I have to live?" As many times as the cuckoo cuckoos – that's how many years to live. The Bashkirs have such a belief: if a cuckoo cuckoos at sunrise on a green tree, the year will be fruitful, but if it cuckoos at night "on a bare tree," there will be famine and pestilence. "If a cuckoo cuckoos on the roof of a house, the owner will die," in such cases, they poured milk on the tree or building on which the bird was sitting. [Bashkirkoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1987, p. 97].

Researchers note that the cuckoo is also a symbol of the prosperity of the country, a symbol of the blessed Altai, where there is neither winter nor summer, and where the hero lives. In many epics, a stable expression is found: *edil küügi edip yadar yayy-kyjy bildirbes, keen Yarash Altayda* " on the beautiful Altai, where the cuckoo (always) cuckoos, where there is no difference between winter and summer."

Legends, traditions, fairy tales, and songs were composed about the cuckoo. The cuckoo is the most mysterious bird. Separate beliefs and omens were associated with it. The image of the cuckoo has multifaceted semantics. In the image of birds, archaic features connected with animistic ideas can be discerned.

### **Crane (turna) – Sacred Bird**

The crane occupies an important place in Altai fairy tales. Researchers believe that the crane is a sacred bird; it must never be killed, as this will bring misfortune. Cranes live their whole lives in pairs and are strictly monogamous. Each pair has its own nest. When one of the pair dies, the surviving one always comes to the place where its other half died and lives alone for a very long time, or dies. Cranes are a symbol of love and devotion to family. It is considered a sin to shoot and kill a crane; the mate of the killed crane descends to the killed one and does not part with its body. When cranes fly away in autumn, Altai people, saying goodbye to them, give blessings. «*Ezende erte kel, eki kakpakyng aarchyzyn salkoyyn, elem-salam jakshy jan!* / Next year, come early, I will put (for you) cottage cheese from two lids (shurum), goodbye, have a good return! *Ol turuy-nan öltürbey jat, ol eshtü kush. Ol korkushtu ondy kargychy. Ony öltürgen kiji jakshy yürüm yürbes dep ozogy ulus onoyyp baylanyp, öltürbes. A ony bay-labay kem öltürgen, onyng jurtyng korkushtu ulus korop jat, bojop yat. Bot onyng uchun ol eshtü kusty öltürbeyteni ol, altay ulustyng jangyla.* / Cranes are not killed, these birds are paired. They are such terrible cursers. Whoever killed it will not live well, people in the past, thus, being afraid, did not kill. From the family of a person who, without fear, killed a crane, very many people die. That is why these paired birds are not killed, according to the custom of the Altai people" [Altay kep-kuuchyndar, 1994, p. 353].

In Altai oral folk art, most birds are endowed with positive qualities. Researchers note that many birds, such as the crane, swan, white partridge, and others are sacred; they cannot be killed, as this will bring misfortune. G.N. Potapov noted in his research: One who accidentally killed a swan went around the houses of neighbors with this bird until its eyes dried up [Potapov

1883: 33]. Among Altai people, about a person who often visits the same house or often goes visiting, they say disapprovingly: *kuu ajyldadyp jürüng be?* (lit. are you taking a swan visiting?) [Yaimova, 1990, 92]. Daughters of celestial beings descend to earth in the image of these birds [Oinoshev, 1995, 32]. Geese, swans, and other similar birds (e.g., crane, varnavka...) symbolize the upper world in the ideas of the Altai people and in this guise entered the heroic epic, performing the role of messengers there; metamorphic images of celestial maidens play a positive function in relation to the main hero. On the other hand, oral stories confirm that swans, geese, cranes are transformed daughters of celestial beings. Kumandy and Chelkan people (*kuu-kizhi*) call themselves descendants of swans [Potapov, 1953, p.21].

If a crane flies low, there will be cold; if high, there will be heat. If you see a crane wedge in the sky, you need to make a wish. Usually, among many peoples, the crane symbolizes fidelity, happiness. Every autumn, a crane flock forms a wedge and flies south. The arrival of cranes is unnoticeable; how they arrive – no one knows. No bird flock in flight attracts as much attention as cranes.

The image of the crane in Altai fairy tales is interesting. In the fairy tale "Jüs sagysh" / "A Hundred Minds" / the crane is shown as an intelligent bird [Altayskie skazki, 1996, p. 46]. The fairy tale tells about a meeting between a crane and a fox. The fox shames the crane for its long legs, long nose, and small head, accusing it of having only one mind in its small head. And she has a beautiful appearance, a long fluffy tail, and a hundred minds in her head. At this time, a hunter comes out. The fox and the crane hide in one burrow. When the hunter approaches the burrow, the crane pretends to be dead. The hunter pulls out the crane and throws it aside; then the bird flies up. Thus, the crane saves itself from death, and the hunter kills the fox, which has a hundred minds. Through these images, human characters are shown.

The cult of the crane has been preserved in the traditional culture of the Altai people. Cranes are connected in the ideas of the Altai people with the upper world, endowed with positive qualities, and present in the folk art of the Altai people.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

To identify and describe the symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics and their symbolic characteristics in the linguoculture of the Altai people.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In accordance with the set goal, a complex of methods and techniques for analyzing factual material was used in the course of the work: synchronic and diachronic analysis when identifying symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics using the comparative method and elements of componential analysis; synchronic-descriptive method when studying the features of symbols.

#### **6. Findings**

In this article, the symbols of ornithological images in Altai heroic epics are investigated for the first time.

*Mürküt* "golden eagle". In Altai heroic epics, huge mythical birds are found, for example: the cult of the golden eagle is one of the most universal, found among different peoples, even those most distant from each other. This bird is a totem of some Siberian tribes. The names of some

Altai clans are identified with the name of the eagle-golden eagle (mürküt). For example, among the Altai people, the revered bird-totem of the Irkit, Mayman, Mundus clans is the *golden eagle*. Another one of the most common characters in heroic epics, occupying an important place in the worldview and culture of the Altai people, is the bird eagle. Researchers note its heavenly origin. The eagle's closeness to the sky predetermined its guardian function – it sits near the palace doors. These birds were considered a connecting link between people and the upper world. They are fast as lightning, as the wind. It should be noted that the eagle in Altai heroic epics is endowed with positive qualities. The taboo – not to kill an eagle, a golden eagle – speaks of the significance of these birds among the Altai people.

In the heroic epics of the Altai people, besides eagles, the mythical bird Kan-Kerede possesses enormous size and powerful strength. The wind blows from the flapping of its wings, rain falls from its tears. In this work, under the term "eagle," all falconiformes representatives of the eagle family are understood. In folklore works and ethnographic literature, these birds (eagle, golden eagle, falcon, etc.) are not always clearly differentiated.

The images of giant birds (Kan-Kerede, Mürküt, etc.) are created in the Altai heroic epics "Maaday-Kara," "Alyp-Manash," "Altay-Buuchay," "Kögütey," "Solotoy Mergen,". These are eagles, golden eagles, with huge large wings, sharp claws, large beaks, possessing extraordinary strength, capable of carrying a person on their back from one place to another. The narrator endows them with reason: the birds understand human speech and can talk. The analysis of the heroic epic shows that birds perform various functions: they are messengers between the main characters, they are symbols of the upper world. The eagle flies higher and longer than all other birds; it has always been closer to the sky than all other birds. Eagles prefer to be in the air almost all the time, building nests on the highest trees. This probably served as the reason for them being called "heavenly birds." There is an opinion that birds previously served as objects of sacrifice, later replaced by other animals. But the role of mediators remained with them – they serve as messengers from the upper world. Furthermore, they act as messengers between khagans.

The presence of the eagle cult among the Altai and other Turkic peoples speaks of ethnic interconnections. The archaic ancestor cult has been preserved in ideas about totems: about the eagle, golden eagle among some Siberian tribes. For many peoples, the eagle was a symbol of heavenly (solar) power, the swiftness of fire and lightning.

The place and role of the eagle in oral folk art illustrate the worldview of the Altai population about the traditional mythological picture of the world.

Birds can warn their owner of danger and save heroes from death. In the heroic epic "Maaday-Kara," when Kara-Kula kaan arrived with war on the land of the hero Maaday-Kara, two black golden eagles try to inform the hero of the danger, thereby helping Maaday-Kara prepare to meet the opponent.

The epics often use a metaphor illustrating the phenomenon of shapeshifting of these birds with their characteristic modes of movement. In heroic epics, eagles can transform into other birds to help their friend.

Often, a horse in Altai heroic epics turns into an eagle. Apparently, the symbol of the horse-bird is connected with an archaic cult. The symbol of the horse combines with the image of the eagle and is also associated with the sky. An idealized image of eagles is characteristic of heroic epics.

*Küük* "cuckoo". In Altai heroic epics, the cuckoo acts as a resurrector, sometimes as a herald of death, i.e., it is both a positive and a negative character. It can serve the hero's enemy or be a heavenly messenger. In the heroic epic, the cuckoo also appears as a benefactor of people. It symbolizes this, being a herald of summer. Apparently, such an image is connected with the people's dream of eternal well-being, eternal youth (the theme of many folk tales).

Researchers note that the cuckoo is also a symbol of the prosperity of the country, a symbol of the blessed Altai, where there is neither winter nor summer, and where the hero lives. In many epics, a stable expression is found: *edil küügi edip yadar yayı-kyjy bildirbes, keen jarash Altayda* "on the beautiful Altai, where the cuckoo (always) cuckoos, where there is no difference between winter and summer."

Legends, traditions, fairy tales, and songs were composed about the cuckoo. The cuckoo is the most mysterious bird. Separate beliefs and omens were associated with it. The image of the cuckoo has multifaceted semantics. In the image of birds, archaic features connected with animistic ideas can be discerned.

*Turna* "crane" – sacred bird. The crane occupies an important place in Altai fairy tales. Researchers believe that the crane is a sacred bird; it must never be killed, as this will bring misfortune. Cranes are a symbol of love and devotion to family.

In Altai oral folk art, most birds are endowed with positive qualities. Researchers note that many birds, such as the crane, swan, white partridge, and others are sacred; they cannot be killed, as this will bring misfortune. Geese, swans, and other similar birds (e.g., *varnavka*...) symbolize the upper world in the ideas of the Altai people and in this guise entered the heroic epic, performing the role of messengers there; metamorphic images of celestial maidens play a positive function in relation to the main hero. On the other hand, oral stories confirm that swans, geese, cranes are transformed daughters of celestial beings.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, ornithological symbols in Altai heroic epics, in the linguoculture of the Altai people, reflect certain qualities of people. The figurative characteristics of birds are closely connected with their evaluative traits, i.e., with determining what is good and what is bad, what should be done and what should not. The evaluative characteristics of these concepts are embodied in Altai heroic epics and legends.

The above convinces what enormous potential is contained in the lexico-semantic group "ornithonym" primarily for linguists; the examination of the symbolic meanings of bird names revealed national value characteristics. Based on everyday observations of birds, people not only formed knowledge about them but also came to a certain symbolic understanding of birds.

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