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DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL ASPECTS IN THE TEACHING OF MYTHOLOGEMS IN HEROIC EPICS

Abstract. This article studies cultural and cognitive aspects of 'good and evil' mythologems in heroic epics. The mythologeme "good and evil" is one of the fundamental concepts frequently found in heroic songs and is an important component of educating students' cognitive and cultural abilities. Heroic epics are critical to preserving mythological consciousness and individual identities. Their application of binary opposition has remained unchanged, despite the changes related to, for example, time/era and living conditions. This study explores, compares, and contrasts the contexts and meanings embedded in Kazakh heroic epics (*Alpamys"*, "*Kobylandy"*) with the poem "*Odysseus"*. The article uses a multi-method qualitative approach, including comparative phraseological analysis (semantic and component aspects), cognitive analysis (methods and conceptual categories). In addition, a survey was conducted among 52 students of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University using the Google forms platform to study their perception of mythologemes in heroic poems. As a result, binary oppositions and mythological content of the characters were identified, and the students' attitudes towards the poem were analyzed. The characters' cognitive and cultural aspects in the heroic epic were categorized into conceptual, image-figurative, and symbolic components. Theoretical and practical implications are also outlined.

Keywords: mythologem, folklore, heroic epic, culture, cognition, Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz, Mystan Kempir, Alpamys, Kobylandy, Odysseus.

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Батырлық эпостардағы мифологемаларды оқытуда студенттердің танымдық және мәдени аспектілерін дамыту

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада батырлар жырындағы «жақсылық пен жамандық» мифологемаларының мәдени және танымдық аспектілері қарастырылды. «Жақсылық пен жамандық» мифологемасы батырлық әндерде жиі кездесетін негізгі ұғымдардың бірі студенттердің танымдық және мәдени қабілеттерін тәрбиелеудің маңызды құрамдас бөлігі. Мифологемалар баяндаудың негізгі элементі ретінде танымдық белсенділік пен мәдени тұрғыда түсінуге мүмкіндіктер береді. Батырлық эпостар мифологиялық сана мен жеке тұлғаны сақтау үшін аса маңызды. Олардың бинарлы оппозицияны қолдануы, мысалы, уақыт/дәуір және өмір сүру жағдайларына байланысты өзгерістерге қарамастан, өзгеріссіз қалды. Бұл зерттеуде қазақтың қаһармандық эпосының («Алпамыс», «Қобыланды») «Одиссей» поэмасымен қамтылған контекстері мен мән-мағыналары зерттеліп, салыстырылып, салыстырылады. Мақалада салыстырмалы фразеологиялық талдау (семантикалық және компоненттік аспектілер), танымдық талдау (әдістер мен концептуалды категориялар) талдауды қамтитын көп әдістемелік сапалы тәсіл қолданылды. Сонымен қатар, Қожа Ахмет Ясауи атындағы Халықаралық қазақ-түрік университетінің 52 студенті арасында олардың батырлар жырындағы мифологемаларды қабылдауын зерттеу мақсатында Google forms платформасы арқылы сауалнама жүргізілді. Нәтижесінде бинарлы оппозициялар мен кейіпкерлердің мифологиялық мазмұны анықталып, студенттердің жырға деген көзқарасы талданды. Батырлық эпостағы кейіпкерлердің танымдық және мәдени аспектілері концептуалды, образдық-бейнелі және символдық құрамдас бөліктерге жіктелінді. Сондай-ақ теориялық және практикалық салдарлары көрсетілді.

Кілт сөздер: мифологема, фольклор, батырлық эпос, мәдениет, білім, Баба Түкті Шашты Әзиз, Мыстан кемпір, Алпамыс, Қобыланды, Одиссей.

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Развитие познавательных и культурологических аспектов учащихся при преподавании мифологем в героическом эпосе

Аннотация. В статье исследуются культурно-когнитивные аспекты мифологем «добро и зло» в героическом эпосе. Мифологема «добро и зло» – одно из фундаментальных понятий,

часто встречающихся в героических песнях, и является важным компонентом развития когнитивных и культурных способностей учащихся. Героические эпопеи имеют решающее значение для сохранения мифологического сознания и индивидуальности. Их применение бинарной оппозиции осталось неизменным, несмотря на изменения, связанные, например, со временем/эпохой и условиями жизни. В данном исследовании исследуются, сравниваются и противопоставляются контексты и смыслы, заложенные в казахских героических эпосах («Алпамыс», «Кобыланды») с поэмой «Одиссей». В статье использован многометодный качественный подход, включающий сопоставительный фразеологический анализ (семантический и компонентный аспекты), когнитивный анализ (методы и понятийные категории). Кроме того, был проведен опрос среди 52 студентов Международного казахско-турецкого университета имени Ходжи Ахмета Ясави с использованием платформы Google forms для изучения их восприятия мифологем в героических поэмах. В результате были выявлены бинарные оппозиции и мифологическое содержание персонажей, а также проанализировано отношение учащихся к эпосу. Познавательные и культурные аспекты героев героического эпоса были разделены на концептуальную, образно-выразительную и символическую составляющие. Также изложены теоретические и практические последствия.

Ключевые слова: мифологема, фольклор, героический эпос, культура, познание, Баба Тукти Шашти Азиз, Мыстан Кемпир, Алпамыс, Кобыланды, Одиссей.

Introduction

Folklore heritage is an expressive part of spiritual culture and a source of ideological, aesthetic, and moral values. Folklore is a cultural and integral system that unites the people into a whole and determines the ethnic worldview. As a particular form of intellectual, artistic, aesthetic, and moral and ethical self-expression of the people, folklores reflect the national culture [1]. An integral part of folklore is the myths. Mythologems have distinct binary oppositions with inherent linguistic and cultural features. A mythologem, defined as a global character used in mythology, has exaggerated features that can easily elicit lessons and teachings to the younger generation [2]. Research has focused on the binary oppositions (e.g. good–evil contradictions) in the mythologems and how they determine individuals' moral development.

Binary oppositions are defined as typical human characteristics, where two opposite concepts exist, and are a universal means of rationally (consciously) describing the world [3]. Many questions still abound, such as how dualities in myths determine individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and their perceptions of the world (Vendina, 2007). The current study aims to answer these questions.

Binary opposition was first investigated by de Saussure in his exploration of the theory of structuralism. According to the theory of structuralism, literary works are defined in reciprocal determination with one another such that they complement each other. Through binary opposition, literary works can be understood when placed in a larger context but not in isolation [4]. Binary oppositions in mythological texts serve as a universal means of understanding the world, reflecting archetypal thinking and cultural worldviews. These oppositions help express national identity and clarify the structure of the universe, often depicting the unity of opposing forces in nature [5].

Binary opposition has been applied in many fields and contexts other than literature, for instance the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, religious beliefs in angels and demons, and the biological assignment of male and female gender. Therefore, the application of binary opposition is fundamental in all areas of life.

The essence of good and evil is quite natural and justified. The ethical dualities in mythologems consist of opposite and interconnected components of human characteristics. The

dualities in mythologemes are reflected in daily language and vocabularies and are often aligned with society's social values. For instance, many mythologems will use antonyms to create contradictions, such as mind versus body, good versus evil, man versus woman, or presence versus absence. The current study semantically examines the language used in myths to determine these dualities. Contradictory language creates imagery and symbolism that triggers consciousness and allows people to relate to the mythologem.

This article aims to contribute to research in two ways. First, it contributes to the mythology literature. The current study explores contexts and meanings embedded in heroic epics ("*Alpamys*", "*Kobylandy*") with the poem "*Odysseus*". Previous research has shown cross-cultural differences among mythologem. However, their behavioural expressions differ in every context. The current study undertakes a comparative analysis to examine the binary opposition manifested by *Mystan Kempir* and *Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz*. The comparative study examines similar findings across cultures.

Second, the study contributes to the literature on the semantic analysis of mythologems. The study analyses the words, images, and phrases used in the four heroic epics and categorizes them into themes. This analysis teases apart the contexts, languages, and frequency of the binary opposition. According to Nietzsche, fiction acquaints all individuals with global concepts, such as *dreams of faith and sorrows,* that lead to the evolution of the soul. The study, therefore, answers the call to tease apart each scenario before making conscious judgments concerning the characters [6].

The national-cultural picture of the world is realized through myths and mythologems. A mythologem is understood as a set of valuable cultural memories of the people in a society. Research on myths and mythologems reveals a repetition of motivational themes. Comparing the mythologems in the heroic epics, we can determine the connections and differences between cultures. Cultural differences are a factor in intercultural understanding; however, they are also a way to highlight the achievements of a nation, the representation of the subject of culture in relation to happiness, good and evil, the meaning of life, and the importance of values, such as right and duty, and responsibility and justice. These differences show that mythologems help to preserve the cultural heritage of a society.

Cultural heritage is grounded in heroes who have saved their people from wars, starvation, or death. In his examination of heroic works, noted that the gods and supernatural beings explained the origin, fate, and future of the world; however, they also required other mortals to worship them, otherwise they would impose punishment or death [7]. Bell stated that these heroes, spirits (ancestors), angels, demons, devils, and monsters have an influence on human behaviour [8]. The hero has a strong moral identity manifested in tirelessly administering justice to opposing forces. Such binary contradictions are preserved in folklore as the struggle of heroes, the victory of good, and the defeat of evil. These mythologems have heroes, villains, and victims, as well as helpers, enemies, and messengers who connect the good and evil forces. Researchers have suggested that some divine and mystical forces were good (e.g. God, angels) while others were evil (e.g. demons, devils, and monsters). In this context, the people of Kazakhstan believed God to be the source of everything good, with the best interests of every individual at heart. Their mythologems described god as the source of light, love, life, and heaven. Such mythologems reinforced belief in God and religion in Kazakhstan.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, researchers and practitioners developed an interest in Kazakh folklore's ethnographic material. Researchers began exploring Kazakh oral folk poetry, as well as that of other Turkic-speakers, exploring epics such as "*Alpamys Batyr*", "*Kobylandy*" and numerous ritual folklore songs. These researchers argued that folklores were unique to nations, but they required international cooperation to gain influence. For example, the Republic of Kazakhstan comprises Russians, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Tajiks,

Kyrgyz, and Altai. These subtribes have unique tales, legends, and songs, but they have identical epic canvases, rituals, and domestic samples [9]. Understanding folklores from all the subtribes influences national identity and boosts Kazakhstan's historical features. Comparative studies have revealed the commonality of many features inherent in the Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek, Karakalpak, Mongolian, Bashkir, Turkmen, Buryat, and Tatar cultural links, themes, motifs, and general compositional characteristics. Therefore, continuous contact has spurred folklore revisions to accommodate new cultures.

The epic folklores of Kazakhstan (poems, stories, and mythologems) embody such genres as *tolgau* (thinking), *saryn* (tune), *terme* (elected), *zheldirme* (speeding up, quickening, trotting), *aitys* (contest), *zhoktau* (mourning), and *nakyl soz* (farewell). The folklore is performed with an expressive power that includes high speech tones and dominant facial expressions. This performance allows the audience to feel, clearly and subtly, all the creative piece's negative and positive vicissitudes.

Research questions

Based on the above discussions, this paper aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1. Is there binary opposition in Kazakhstan's mythologems?

RQ2. What are the distinct characteristics of the characters in the epics?

RQ3. What perceptions do youth have regarding heroic epics?

RQ4. What are the cognitive and cultural similarities in the personae of Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Mystan Kempir?

Research methods and materials

A methodology that combines queantitive and qualitive research approaches is known as a mixed methods. A more thorough comprehension of intricate research questions is made possible by this integration. The use of mixed methods in teaching the cognitive and cultural significance of mythologemes in heroic epics is recognized as a reliable approach. By combining quantitative (e.g., surveys) and qualitative (e.g., interviews) methods, it is possible to capture not only learning outcomes but also the symbolic, interpretive, and cultural dimensions of students' responses to epic narratives. Creswell and Plano Clark [10] argue that mixed methods research is particularly well-suited for educational settings where both concrete knowledge (quantitative data) and personal engagement (qualitative insights) are important. Therefore, this methodology supports a fuller understanding of how epics shape cognitive development and cultural identity. This study used a mixed method: a qualitative method was used to conduct a textual and semantic analysis of the poem, and a quantitative method was used to create a questionnaire using the Google Forms platform and survey the attitudes of 52 students.

These methods were selected from previous literature, and they have been used for generalizations in the modelling-method frameworks. Kazakh mythologems were extracted from extensive myths sets, surveys, and participant observation. For this study, the researchers focused on heroic epics ("*Alpamys*", "*Kobylandy*") due to their popularity in Kazakhstan and their international acclaim. These epics have been examined in previous research [10].

Next, data were extracted from the mythologems for analysis. Simultaneously, the selected mythologems underwent a keyword extraction process. Keywords such as antagonist, epic, witch, evil, hero, and good were retrieved from prior research. The keywords used in the mythologems were identified and clustered into themes: sources of kinship; traditions; and creativity.

Finally, a questionnaire was sent to 52 students in a large university in K.A.Yasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University students. The questionnaire aimed to determine the students' perception of mythologems in the heroic epics by analysing images. The participants were expected to evaluate each character based on the binary oppositions provided. They were also

required to indicate the images' sources (e.g. heroic epics and books). The participants were informed that their responses were confidential and that their participation was voluntary. They were then asked to sign the consent forms.

The first research question investigated how binary contrasts (e.g. virtuous and wicked, holy and unholy) are presented in Kazakh heroic stories. The assessments aimed to identify figurative contrasts and repeated legendary disputes in "Alpamys Batyr" and "Kobylandy Batyr" through cross-cultural evaluations with Homer's "Odyssey".

The second research question aimed to identify cultural important character prototypes including the advisor and religious leader. The prototypes were studied through a legendary and cultural perspective to understand how narrative roles develop moral and cultural understanding.

The third research question used a survey of undergraduate students to understand how students perceive and understand mythologemes in heroic stories. The questions used a Likert scale to measure students' awareness, respect, and cultural association with epic mythologemes and an open-response question to encourage deeper thinking about subjects such as moral principles, cultural identity, and significance to contemporary existence.

The fourth research question was used to compare the mythological roles of the characters Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz and Mistan Kempir. Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz was analyzed as a spiritual protector and embodiment of divine guidance, while Mistan Kempir was interpreted as a manifestation of chaos and destructive feminine power. These characters were assessed in terms of their cognitive impact on the audience and their cultural symbolism in maintaining mythological consciousness.

Results

4.1 RQ1. Is there binary opposition in Kazakhstan's mythologems?

The findings regarding the four heroic epics (*Alpamys*, *Kobylandy*) revealed that these epics glorify the confrontation between antagonists. The binary opposition is between *zhaksylyk* (good) and *zhamandyk* (evil).

In the epic *Parpariya*, the binary opposition is between *Baba Tutki Shashty Aziz* (hero) and *Mystan Kempir* (perpetrator). Baba Tutkti and Mystan Kempir are antagonists whose enmity transcends to higher beings (i.e. God versus the devil). *Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz or Baba Tuklas (hairy old man) is a saint who appears to childless parents (victims) and promises to be their assistant, patron, and protector (hero). Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz later promises them a child with supernatural powers. Mystan Kempir (Baba Yaga)* acts as an evil force in the epic. These binary oppositions are depicted in Figure 1.
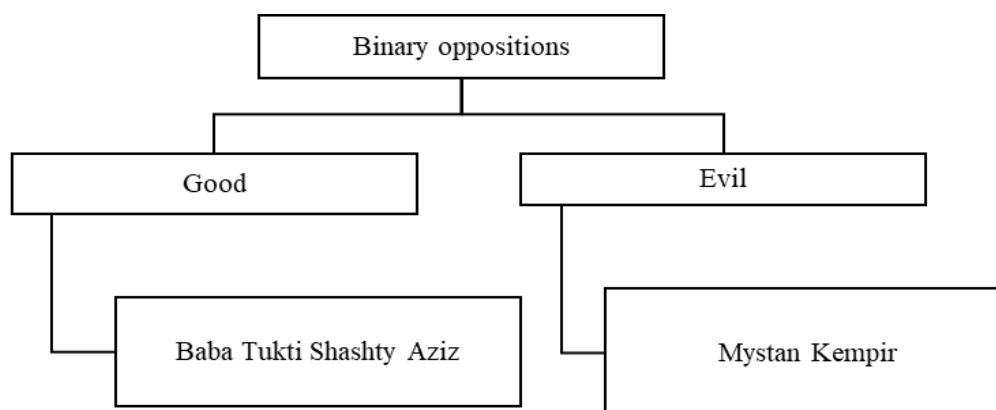

Figure 1 – Binary opposition in Kazakh mythology

4.2 RQ2. What are the distinct characteristics of the characters in the epics?

In the epic *Parprariya*, the name 'Baba' is sung to reflect the hero's position as the protector. The name Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz is translated to mean 'hairy old man'. The hair is the hero's mystical power and Baba has hair from his beard to his knees. The lexeme of the mythologem 'Baba', 'Babai' is often used among Turkic-speaking people to mean *grandfather (ata) or great-grandfather* (*ulken*, *Argy ata*). In Russian-Slavic languages, this word means a woman, similar to *kempir* (Baba, grandmother). The detailed lexeme is shown in Figure 2.
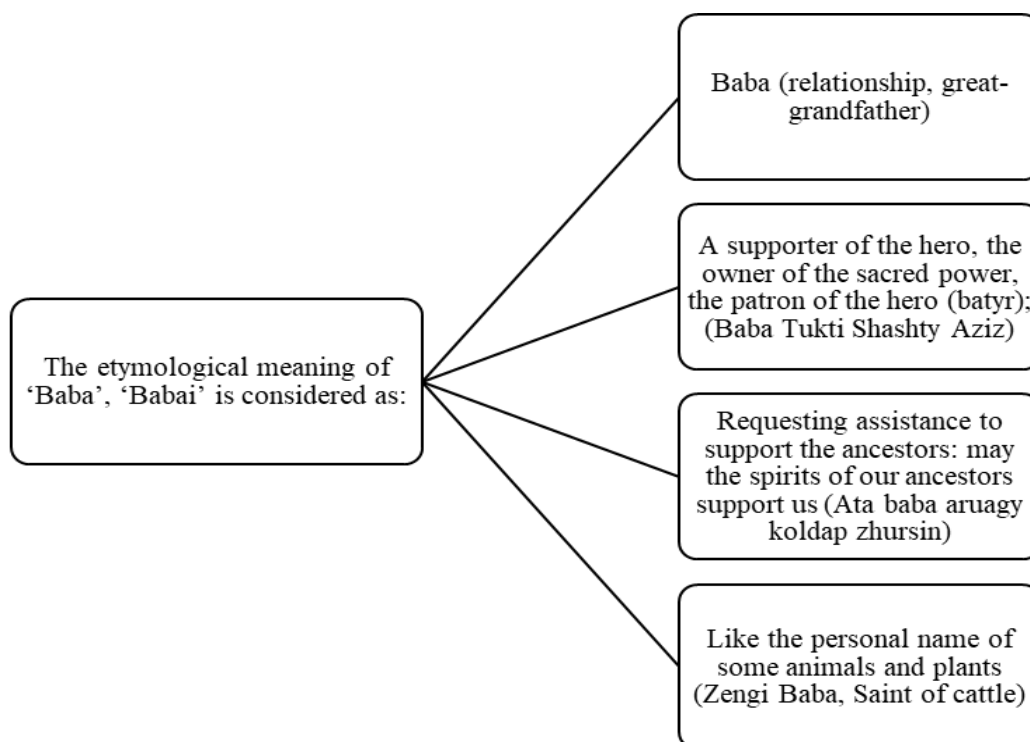

Figure 2 – The lexeme of the mythologem 'Baba', 'Babai'

In the epic, Mystan Kempir is presented as the helper who provides the hero with magical items (e.g. horses) when faced with a challenge. Mystan Kempir is described as the embodiment of evil: a female antagonist who is three hundred years old, curses a lot, wears tattered clothes, and is exceptionally cunning (see Figure 3).
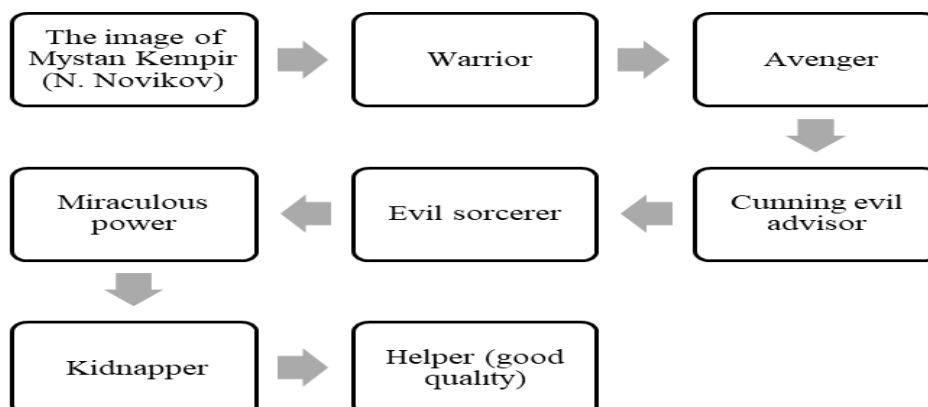

Figure 3 – Distinct characteristics of Mystan Kempir

4.3 RQ3. What perceptions do youth have regarding heroic epics?

As shown in Table 1, the participants perceived the characters of Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Mystan Kempir as either good or evil. The participants perceived Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz as good (81%) and Mystan Kempir as evil (97.6%). The participants described Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz using positive attitude adjectives, such as kind, dependable, trustworthy, joyful, and happy (85%), as well as and neutral attitude adjectives, such as indifferent and apathetic (15%). The participants described the old woman (Mystan Kempir) using negative attitude adjectives, such as hateful, evil, temptuous, and aggressive (87%), as well as neutral attitude adjectives (13%).

Table 1 – Student perceptions of Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Mystan Kempir

No.	Question	Answer options	Percentage	
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	
1	Indicate the level of your knowledge of ethnic culture.	I know this very well	61.9	
		I don't know this very well	11.9	
		I want to know this	26.2	
		I don't want to know this	-	
2	How do you feel about your ethnic identity?	National pride, honour	81	
		Reliability, status	14.3	
		Grief, resentment	-	
		I don't feel anything	2.5	
3	Where do you get information about the similarities between heroic characters?	Books	50	
		Newspapers and magazines	19	
		Internet resources	88.1	
		During classes	23.8	
		Through personal communication experience	42.9	
4	Regarding the mythologems, where do you know these images from?	Fairy tales	50^1	90.2^2
		Heroic songs	54.8^1	2.4^2
		Documentary films	7.1^1	26.8^2
		Cartoons	9.5^1	34.1^2
5	The image of Baba is known for you as:	Protector of heroes, a force that gives special grace to childless parents	82.9	
		The father or grandfather of batyr Yedige	22	
		Preacher of Islam	12.2	
		The father of an epic hero Parpariya	7.3	
6	The image of Mystan is known for you as:	An evil force that can fly with a broom, turn people into different animals (usually pigs)	23.8	
		A cunning woman who sets traps for heroes with perpetrates evil deeds	50	
		Medium height, hunched over, congenitally ugly, hairy, evil devil	21.4	
		Magician, lives in a house that walks on chicken legs, traps people and throws them in the oven	4.9	

Continuation of Table 1

1	2	3						4			
7	These images are recognized as:	A symbol of good						81^1		-	
		The power of evil						4.9^1		97.6^2	
		Not familiar						7.1^1		2.4^2	
		Neutral attitude						7.1^1		-	
8	Are there any similarities between Baba > Athena[1], the image of Mystan > Circe, Calypso[2]?	Yes						38.1^1		52.4^2	
		No						7.1^1		9.5^2	
		Not sure						50^1		31^2	
		Don't know						4.9^1		7.1^2	
9	Indicate on the scale your level of knowledge of the mythologem 'good–evil'.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		2.4%	0%	4.9%	2.4%	7.3%	26.8%	14.66%	14.6%	19.5%	7.3%

4.4 RQ4. What are the cognitive and cultural similarities in the personae of Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Mystan Kempir?

As shown in Figure 4, the characters' cognitive and cultural aspects in the epics can be categorized as conceptual, image-figurative, and symbolic. All components personified the binary oppositions.
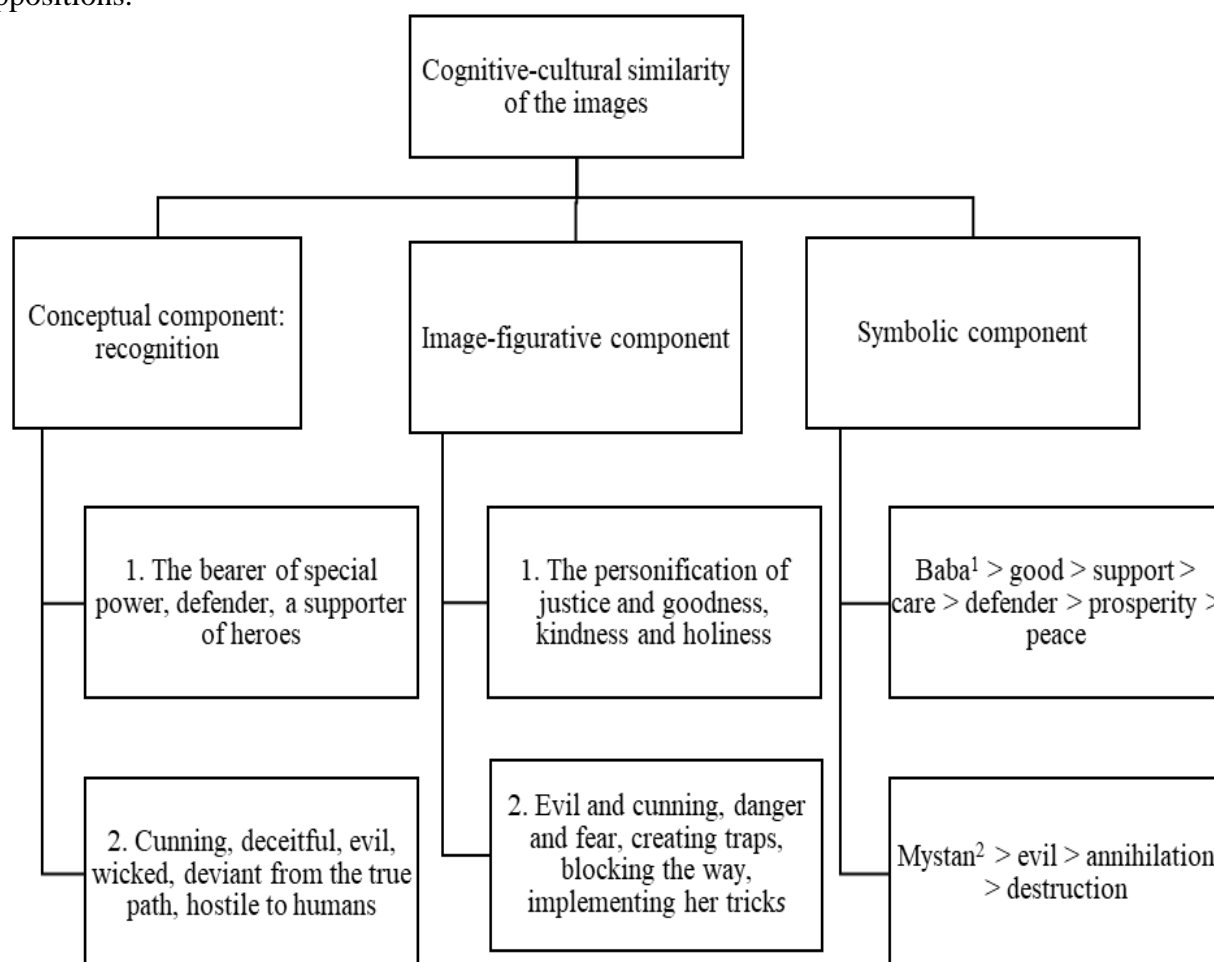

Figure 4 – The cognitive and cultural aspects of the characters in Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz and Mystan Kempir

Discussion

Theoretical contribution

This article contributes to research in two ways. First, it contributes to the mythology literature by exploring the contexts and meanings embedded in three cultural mythologies. Previous research has shown cross-cultural differences among mythologems. Wong-MingJi found that leaders shared the same characteristics across countries. However, their behavioural expressions differed in every context [12]. The current study builds on these findings to posit that the perception of good and evil projected by Mystan Kempir and Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz in these epics will be reflected in every mythologem across language cultures. Only a comparative analysis can highlight the similarities and differences in the characters and enhance cross-cultural communication.

Second, the study contributes to the literature on the semantic analysis of mythologems. The findings reveal the positive, negative, and neutral attitude adjectives used to describe the characters. The good characters had more positive attitude adjectives than the evil characters. These findings align with Nietzsche's arguments that fiction acquaints all individuals with global concepts, such as *dreams of faith and sorrows,* that lead to the evolution of the soul. Therefore, it is important to tease apart each scenario to make conscious judgments.

Practical implications

All analysed supernatural-mystical forces or beings have their place in the national and cultural image of people in relation to their picture of the world, in which good and evil can help people or cause them harm. This also helps them to expand their knowledge and to learn to accept the cultural traditions of the people influencing their inner world. This teaching process affects students' artistic perception, increases literary knowledge, leads to the conscious analysis and evaluation of mythologems, and develops thinking in relation to artistic images. Further, students develop their aesthetic taste, respect for the culture of their ethnic group, and develop a sense of the beauty of the national consciousness and ethical, spiritual, and moral qualities.

Building on Onischak's article, he argues that binary structures help students build moral foundations and increase intercultural sensitivity [13]. In particular, Kazakh epics support a strong mythological consciousness in which symbolic images persist despite temporal and social changes. This suggests that mythologemes remain effective as a means of cultural preservation and moral justification in the context of contemporary education.

The study of mythologems empowers individuals to expand their worldview through integrating multiple languages, beliefs, traditions, and values when analysing heroes, villains, and victims. Individuals develop skills to identify various epics' origins (e.g. Alpamys-Odysseus or Gulbarshyn-Penelope). These skills enable them to identify universal human values and gain a perspective of other people's attitudes and behaviours (e.g. good versus evil, eternal versus temporary). This global consciousness also triggers spiritual kinship and an understanding and acceptance of the universal similarity among individuals.

The study of mythology enables researchers and practitioners to identify with their myths and motivates them to explore the mythologems' themes. For instance, individuals acquaint themselves with the atmosphere of early folklore while studying and analysing epics. They also appreciate the beauty (versus horror) of the myths as they comprehend the relationships among the characters.

Conclusion

Mythologems represent a crucial underpinning of cultural heritage. In particular, the mythologems of good and evil are universal concepts. The interpretation of the universal images found in heroic epics is a cultural phenomenon. Such cultural and cognitive research provides an understanding of epic texts. Considering the binary oppositions in mythological texts provides a way to characterize the social values thematically imposed by mythologems.

In conclusion, the semantic analysis of the binary opposition in mythologems reflects the social values. These concepts are one of the main conditions for the stability of society and humanity's existence. The study's findings can be used as material for students, both in universities and schools, and for readers interested in learning about heroic epics.

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