

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2020.24.4.2>**ОБРАЗ КОШКИ В РУССКИХ И КИТАЙСКИХ ПРИМЕТАХ: СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

Статья посвящена описанию зоонима «кошка» в приметах неродственных языков. Формируется представление об отношении к кошке в России и Китае с точки зрения религиозного и мифологического восприятия этого домашнего животного, проанализированы структуры построения словарных статей в двух языках, приведены семантические поля *кошка* в русском и китайском языках. Материалом исследования послужила авторская картотека, состоящая из 16 китайских и 47 русских примет, отобранных из лексикографических источников приёмом сплошной выборки. Осуществлено описание примет с точки зрения особенностей плана содержания, проведён сопоставительный анализ русских и китайских примет для выявления лингвокультурологических особенностей. Сделаны выводы об исторически сложившемся двойственном отношении к кошке в двух лингвокультурах.

**Ключевые слова:** зооним, кошка, примета, китайские приметы, русские приметы, лингвокультурология, языковая картина мира.

**IMAGE OF CATS IN RUSSIAN AND CHINESE OMENS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The Article is devoted to the description of the zoonym "cat" in the omens of unrelated languages. An idea is formed about the attitude to the cat in Russia and China from the point of view of religious and mythological perception of this pet, the structures of building dictionary entries in two languages are analyzed, semantic fields of the cat in Russian and Chinese are provided. The research material was the author's card index, consisting of 16 Chinese and 47 Russian omens, selected from lexicographic sources using the method of continuous sampling. The article describes signs and omens from the point of view of features of the content plan, and provides a comparative analysis of the Russian and Chinese omens to identify linguistic and cultural features. Conclusions are drawn about the historically formed ambivalent attitude to the cat in both countries.

**Keywords:** zoonym, cat, signs and omens, Chinese omens, Russian omens, cultural linguistics, language picture of the world.

**Introduction**

Zoonymic vocabulary is the most ancient layer of the language system of any nation. The need for using zoonyms in speech indicates their linguistic potential, and the names of animals that are part of the paroemia not only demonstrate originality of ethnic perception, but also allow to track the change in attitude to a particular representative of the fauna with time. According to L.N. Gishkaeva and O.V. Lomakina, "the study of zoonyms as culturally marked components of phraseology and paremiology is universal and national, and complements information about the national world view of a particular people" [7, P. 317].

The zoomorphic cultural pattern is mainly universal in various linguistic cultures, exceptions are animals and birds that are found only in a certain area (for example, brown bear, muskrat, pink gull in Russia; panda, black gibbon, ibis in China), or fantastic creatures that have arisen on the basis of national myths and legends, i.e., going back to folklore traditions. At the same time, a comparative analysis of zoonyms found in the paroemia of unrelated languages is of no less interest, which allows us to discover the uniqueness of the linguistic world view of different nationalities.

In this article, we consider the zoonym of cat, which is part of the Russian and Chinese omens and superstitions, being a national-cultural component of communication in both Russian and Chinese, and helping to form a more complete picture of the similarities and differences between the linguistic cultures of Russia and China.

**Methods:** continuous sampling of material from lexicographic sources, the method of linguistic and cultural analysis, descriptive-analytical and comparative methods.

**The results of the study and their discussion**

Cat "is one of the typical Russian mythological images" [12, P. 95] and acts as a stereotypical image in Russian linguistic culture. In China, the attitude to it is ambiguous: the animal, being a friend of man, often falls under people's contempt and offence. [18, P. 43].

The purpose of cat in Russian linguistic culture reflects the dictionary meaning of the lexeme: "A domestic animal with the habits of a predator that destroys mice and rats" [15, P. 118].

Modern Chinese Dictionary contains the following definition: "猫 (lit. cat) – 名词, 哺乳动物, 面部略圆, 躯干长, 耳壳短小, 眼大, 瞳孔随着光线强弱而缩小放大, 四肢较短, 掌部有肉质的垫, 行动敏捷, 善跳跃, 能捕鼠, 毛柔软,

有黑、白、黄、灰褐等色。种类很多。» [22, P. 920] (lit.: A mammal with a rounded face, long body, short ears, and large eyes. The pupil of the eye dilates and contracts in response to light. [Has] relatively short limbs, paws with soft toe pads; moves quickly, jumps well, can catch rats (mice). The fur is soft, can be black, white, red, gray-brown and other colors).

The difference between the above definitions lies in the structure of the dictionary entry: Chinese sources are characterized by a detailed description of the animal's appearance. At the same time, both Russian and Chinese interpretations note the cats' main purpose— to catch mice.

The Chinese character "cat" (猫) belongs to the phono-ideographic category and has a certain reading: 犛 "Quan" (dog) – a key responsible for the meaning of the character and showing that the designated word refers to animals, 苗 "Miao" (shoot, sprout) – phonetic – signals the reading of the character. Part of Miao is related to the totem representations of the Chinese, who strictly separated wild and domestic cats, calling them respectively Li Mao (狸猫) and Mao (猫). It is worth paying attention to the onomatopoeia of the cat's voice, reflected in the name Mao (cf.: meow). In addition, the sound combination Mao in Chinese has the meaning "octogenarian", so the cat is considered a symbol of longevity.

In the proverbs of the Chinese language, the nomination of a cat is more often found with the negative coloration (猫是奸臣, 狗是忠臣 (lit. Cat – a traitor, dog – a loyal servant), 猫改不了偷腥 (lit. All cats steal meat), 猫哭耗子-假慈悲 (lit. The cat mourns the mouse – pretended compassion), but it can also act with the positive connotation: 猫一样乖巧 (lit. Smart like a cat) [18, P. 43].

The semantic field "cat" formed in the Russian language is extensive and includes such categories as *kot* (male cat), *kotenok* (kitten), as well as less common names of this animal: diminutive *koshechka*, *kiska* and *kotik*, colloquial *murlyka* [15, P.118, 51, 115, 312]. In addition to the derivatives *kotyara* (*big cat*), *koshara* (*sturdy cat*), *koshachiy* (*cat-like*) and *po-koshachji* (*in cat-like manner*), the lexemes *koshonki*, *kisa*, *kisyaka* are common in children's speech, while in colloquial speech we see agentives denoting cat persons: *koshatnik* (*cat daddy*) and *koshatnitsa* (*cat lady*) [15, P. 117].

The semantic field "cat" can also include verbs that convey various sounds that these animals are able to produce: *murlykat'* (*to purr*), *myaukat'* (*to meow*), colloquial *myauchit'* (*to meow*), as well as verbal nouns *murlykaniye* (*purring sound*) and *myaukaniye* (*meowing sound*) [15, P. 312, 321]. The word *cat* is often found as the main component in phraseological units, for example, *a shaggy cat*, *live like a cat with a dog*, *like a crazy cat*, *a black cat ran*, *play cat-and-mouse*, *cats scratch the soul* [17, P. 210], etc. According to the data of the Ideographic dictionary of Russian phraseological units with animal names, the *cat* component forms 55 FE, the grammatical grouping of the environment is 31 nouns, 21 adjectives, 35 verbs [10, P.143]. Among the traditional ones, we can name «those cat traits that a native Russian speaker considers typical: sensuality, affectionateness, independence, cunning, vitality» [3, P.70]. The pet is also characterized by the adjectives *shaggy*, *black*, *blind*, *playful*, *sticky*, *affectionate*, *lustful*, *March*, *nasty*, *mad*, and its habits and movements are conveyed by the verbs *sneak*, *climb*, *scramble*, *run by*, *run around*, *crawl*, *fight*, *scratch*, *scrape*, *huddle*, *snuggle up*, *rub*, *nuzzle up*, *caress*, *eat* [10, P. 144].

The habits of cats, as a rule, are reflected in the predictive (initial) part of the omens: *Cat licks its tail*, *hides its head – bad weather is coming*, *Cat reaches for a person – new things will be bought* [4, p. 225], *Cat buries its face – frost or bad weather is coming*, *Cat curls up – frost is coming*, *Cat washes itself – washes in guests (calling)* [6, P. 366, 384].

According to the dictionary "Slavic antiquities", the cat in folk representations is endowed with "dual symbolism and various demonic functions" [5, P. 637] and appears in mythology as an evil force that acts as a conductor between the earth and the other world. However, according to researchers, «Russian culture has much less accepted the idea of the connection between the cat and the devil» [16, P. 32], because in Russia cats appeared somewhat later than in other European countries, and came to be considered a symbol of practical wisdom and cunning.

In Chinese culture, like in Russia, the image of cat is of dual nature. On the one hand, this animal is a symbol of fertility and longevity, the wealth keeper. Since there were few cats in ancient China, they were highly prized for their abilities of catching mice and saving the crop. After introduction of cats, the fields were protected, which had a great importance for China as an agricultural country. In this regard, the Chinese coined such phraseological units as 猫守鼠洞—不动声色 (lit. A cat is waiting for a mouse near its hole with zen-like calm), 猫嘴里的老鼠—跑不了 (lit. When a mouse in cat's mouth escape is impossible), etc. [18, P. 45].

On the other hand, the Chinese associate the cat with the afterworld and endow cats with supernatural abilities to take different guises and communicate with spirits. In ancient folklore, the cat is always regarded as a mystical beast with "unusual abilities" of the dark forces and evil, and, being a nocturnal animal, is referred to the principle of Yin (feminine, darkness, moon, etc.) [2, P. 34].

Contradictory ideas about cats in Russian traditional culture are widely reflected in the omens. It is regarded as a source of benefits in paroemia *Three-colored cat brings happiness to the house it lives in; Seven-colored cat is even more essential to well-being*. [4, P. 226]. In Russian numerical vision, the numbers *three* and *seven* have special symbolism. They are magical, found in both folklore and biblical texts and widely used in phraseological units, proverbs and sayings.

Number *three* primarily embodies the spiritual principle in Russian culture: the reverence in the Orthodox tradition of the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit makes this number a symbol of perfection. The heroes of Russian folk-tales have to pass three challenges to prove their courage, ingenuity and endurance. "Number *seven* is a very important number in the Old and New Testaments (God created the world in seven days, and in the book of Revelation, it was necessary to remove seven seals, seven years of harvest and seven years of failure, and so on). It is connected with the seven planets known at that time <...> Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim refers to Hermes Trismegistus, who called the seven archangels "the seven Regents of the world... who direct to our low world the influences of all the stars and constellations caught by Heaven" [1, P. 192]. The meanings of number seven and their cultural justification can be found in paroemiae. Thus, the phraseological unit "(to be) in the seventh heaven" means "To feel infinitely happy, deeply satisfied", and the idiom "behind seven seals" means "Something completely incomprehensible, impossible to conceive" [17, P. 271, 200], indicating the inaccessibility and security

of some information. That is why three and seven-colored cats are harbingers of well-being, in contrast to black cats, which were considered «a constant companion of and assistant to the witch» [13, P. 153].

The ambivalent attitude to the black cat is evidenced by the paroemia "*Black dog, black cat and black rooster in the house protect from a thunderstorm and a thief*" (and vice versa, they are dangerous during a thunderstorm. *Nizhny Novgorod*) [6, P. 378]. On the one hand, despite the black color, the cat can protect people in disasters; on the other hand, it was banished from the house to protect it from lightning, because they believed that devils «hide in shaggy animals» [13, P. 153]. Negative perception of the black cat is reflected in the meaning of the phraseological unit *a black cat ran past between them*: "Suddenly there was antipathy, alienation, and unfriendliness towards one another." Emergence of this set phrase in speech is explained by the mythological idea of witches being able to turn into black animals, including cats, and "running and crossing in magical symbolism is associated with the rite of violating someone's path, and violent interference of someone's movement". In many cultures, black color is related to death and mourning and is also associated with the first component in the dichotomy of *darkness-light*, i.e. the space of "demonic, sinful-devilish forces" [11, P. 720].

The fact that the Russian people believe the special abilities of cats can be illustrated by the omens: *He who loves and cares about cats will be protected by this cunning beast from any futile trouble* and *They say, the one who first enters a house will die within a year, so they always let a cat or a rooster come in first* [4, P. 226, 303]. While the first belief is about a person's sincere attitude to the pet, the second one shows a certain degree of self-interest: «Let it expel any evil force or take its own troubles and hardships from it» [9, P. 78]. Therewith, a prediction in paroemia *If someone kills a cat, he won't get lucky in the following seven years*, as recorded in "Proverbs of Russian nation" V. I. Dal, and in the "Dictionary of Russian superstitions" by E. A. Grushko, M. Y. Medvedev, warns people about serious punishment.

The cat as the embodiment of evil appears in the omens *Horses thin away because of cats and become nicer because of dogs* (that is why cats are not taken on the road) and *He who sleeps with a cat gets frogs in the head* [6, P. 390, 385]. The prediction in the final part of the omens allows us to assume that the cat here acts as the evil force and can bring trouble to people. The difficulty in the second paroemia is interpretation of the component frogs, which can be associated with a disease or some serious illness. Such associations are confirmed in a story by V. F. Odoevsky *The Story of the Rooster, Cat and Frog*, where this omen is found in the remark of one of the heroines, condemning the imprudent behavior of Ivan Trofimovich, who allows "the cat to whisper in his ear" [14, P. 56].

The explanation of such interpretations can be found in the mythological views of different nations that contain the image of a frog. While in China we can talk about worshipping this amphibian, "which is related to the important function of water and rain in agriculture of this country", "in European tradition, a frog (toad) is regarded as dark power and a helper of witches endowed with destructive energy" [8, P.109]. From a rationalistic point of view, such a view can be explained by the negative impact caused by the appearance of this amphibian on human psyche.

A different linguistics world view appears in the analyzed Chinese omens. The history of the country is reflected in the omen 猫过扬子江金山，则不捕鼠。 [19, P. 47] (lit. Cat will cross the Yangtze river and climb the mountain Jinshan and will not catch mice). The Yangtze river and mount Jinshan are the main cradles of ancient Chinese civilization. The modern name of the Yangtze river can be literary translated as Changjiang, *The Long River*. It is the third-largest and the fourth-longest (6,300 km) river flowing through China. The main food crop on both sides of the Yangtze River has been rice, which is always threatened by rodents. Jinshan is an artificial hill 45.7 m high, which was manually built during the Ming Empire. The omen indicates that a cat that has overcome such a large distance and height will get tired and not be able to fulfill its main purpose to exterminate rodents.

Both in Chinese and Russian culture there is a relationship between dogs and cats, which is shown by the omens: 狗来富，猫来贵。 [24, P. 300] (lit. The dog brings wealth, the cat brings respect), 狗来贵，猫来富。猪来主灾晦。 [25, P. 296] (lit. The dog brings respect, the cat brings wealth and the pig brings ruin to the owner), 猪来贫，狗来富，猫儿来，开质库。 [23, P. 430] (lit. The pig brings poverty, the dog brings wealth, the cat brings business), predict hardships (猪来穷家，狗来富家，猫来孝家。 [21, P. 47] (lit. The pig brings poverty, the dog brings wealth, the cat brings mourning). According to Russian traditions, «a pair of a dog and a cat appears in many verbal statements, beliefs, legends, etc. < ... > Failure is promised by a dog (or a cat) running through the house before setting off on the road or between newly married, or crossing the road before a peasant on the way to the field» [5, P.94]. Comparing cats with dogs, the Chinese found the cats unfaithful, greedy, cunning, and insidious, while the dogs were perceived as faithful and sincere [18, P.46]. Herewith, the interpretation of the Chinese omens containing this pair is ambiguous: in most cases (3), they combine the actions of these animals in the prediction and promise well-being both to the animals and people. However, one of them still states different consequences of the appearance of a dog (to wealth) and a cat (to mourning) in the house.

In Chinese omens, (猪来穷家，狗来富家，猫来孝家。) [21, P. 47] (lit. The pig brings poverty to the house, the dog brings wealth, the cat brings mourning), 猫儿来，带麻布。(lit. The cat brings mourning clothes with it), 猫儿来耗家。 [24, P. 136, 137] (lit. The cat brings mourning to the house)) there is a relationship between the arrival of a cat in the house and death. We believe it is possible to explain this pattern by the Chinese belief that the cat appears in homes where rodents live who bring misfortune, and exterminates them. The pronunciation of the characters 耗 (hao: rat) and 孝 (xiao: funeral) is similar, so the word 'rat' has a figurative meaning of "funeral/mourning".

Three omens with the "cat" component contain good consequences in their final part and promise guests, a wedding or wealth. The omen 梦猫捕鼠者必得财。 [20, P. 12] (lit. Dreaming about cat hunting mice promises wealth) differs in the semantic content of the first part. Perhaps, the prediction is explained by the essence of the process of catching mice by a cat: the animal gains food and becomes full, or saves the owners from the invasion of rodents, thus bringing prosperity.

In this group, there is also a paroemia that contains the word for kitten (猫生子皆雄,主其家有喜事。 [20, P. 2] (lit. If a cats gives birth to males only, owner's house will see a wedding), where the precondition of a happy event in a house is associated with the male sex of the kitten. In Russian versions of omens, there is no such relationship, the lexeme "kitten" is

unique in its use and acts in the cat-mouse dichotomy: *Do not call, caressing, kittens by mouselings name: the mother will eat them.* [6, P.375], [4, P. 226].

Among the paroemiae of the Russian and Chinese origin, the same interpretation of the cat's habit of licking itself is observed. So, in the Chinese variant 猫洗面过耳，则客至。 [20, P. 3] (lit. If the cat washes thoroughly its face and ears, guests will come) the coming of guests depends on the thoroughness of licking (up to the ears). The Russian equivalent of this omen specified in the “*Omens of the Russian people*” by V. I. Dal *A cat washing itself washes in (calls) guests* [6, P. 384] is semantically neutral and neither the name of the body part nor the process quality influence the prediction. However, in the “*Dictionary of Russian Superstitions*”, it is presented in an expanded form. *A cat washing itself washes in (calls) guests. If the washing paw is warm the guests will be good, but if the paw is cold the guests will be evil* [4, P. 225] The forecast contained in the final part is based on positive and negative evaluation of words. The adjective *warm* acquires a contextual synonym *good*, and the adjective *cold* – evil.

### Conclusions

Omens that contain zoonymic vocabularies reflect the relationship between humans and animals, which has existed for thousands of years. They reflect a people's observation of the characteristics of animal behaviors, which are reduced to a certain predictive formula.

The analysis of Russian and Chinese omens with the *cat* component has revealed their relationship with the cultural traditions between Russia and China. The two nations are characterized by ambiguous perception of this pet and the major part of the omens is based on observation of the cat's behaviors. In Russia, the cat is a symbol of worldly wisdom and cunning. In China, it is more often approached from a practical point of view and is valued for its ability to expel mice, which means bringing home relief from troubles.

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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