

Modern practices of regional and ethnic identity of the Yakuts (North Asia, Russia)

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Abstract: Numerous attempts to find the “key” to the identity of a people, sooner or later lead to the need for the analytical approach to mythological-poetical, epic and cultural heritage of peoples studied. This paper presents the analysis of the traditional Yakut epos Olonkho, which is considered by the group of researchers as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining ethnic integrity of the people. The presented results of the research, including the data obtained by the authors in field research, are based on the methods of linguistic and cultural analysis and social constructivism, and serve as key positions, forming a special, integrated self-perception of Yakuts – this process is assisted by the unique properties inherent in the epos itself, such as: fixating the special place of this ethnic group in human history, presence of heroes of universal importance, with supreme physical and spiritual qualities, given by gods; and the sacral connection with the traditional features of everyday life. The content and features of performance of Olonkho is a model illustrating these properties.

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1. Introduction

Studying and constructing the mechanisms of establishing and maintaining ethnic integrity of peoples, which is a popular research topic nowadays, can be conducted by means of referring to the most common characteristics of the most “generalized” people, as well as by means of a narrowly specialized analysis of individual components of local folk culture. The article studies the traditional Yakut epos Olonkho as one of the mechanisms (it might as well be the key one) of efficient work with ethnic identity (Nakhodkina, 2012; Razumovskaya, 2010; Nakhodkina, 2013; Tarasova, 2013; Nakhodkina, 2014; Razumovskaya and Sokolovsky, 2012). Such a perspective of studying a folk-epic literary work is based on the socio-constructivist approach as applied to the study of ethnic and national processes, which is being developing by N. P. Koptseva (Koptseva and Kirko, 2014 (A, B, C, D)). According to this approach, among modern mechanisms of construction of ethnic integrity are the following: pedagogy, traditional hygiene, sports, cinematograph and literature, such as ancient epic tales, the appearance of which is associated with the emergence of the ethnic group itself (Reznikova and Pozdnyakova, 2013; Zamaraeva, 2010; Kistova, 2013; Pimenova, 2012). The epos “Olonkho” was created at the time of formation of Yakut people, but it is still important and relevant nowadays.

The beginning of the second millennium brought radical changes to the social and cultural life

of the Yakut ethnic group. The year 2000 was declared the year of Olonkho – the legendary Yakut epos, which, according to official statements, is 1,250 years old. Olonkho is a concept, standing for both a genre and a separate tale, for example, Olonkhos “Nyurgun Bootur Stremitelny (Swift)”, “Er-Sogotokh”, “Myuldzhyu Silny (Strong)”, “Stroptivy (Obstinate) Kulun Kullustuur”, “Kyys Debiliye” etc. These heroic tales in the form of poetic works, consisting of 6 to 20, in some cases up to 30-50 thousand lines, are very popular among Yakuts.

Abroad and in Russia, in particular in the Sakha Republic, a series of scientific conferences, symposia, seminars and other events were held, at which scientists – representatives of the humanities (historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, linguists, folklorists, etc.) discussed the value of this legendary epos in the context of national and world culture. Numerous scientific researches resulted in the fact that on 25 November, 2005 representatives of the International Committee of UNESCO proclaimed the Yakut heroic epos Olonkho a masterpiece of oral and non-material heritage of humanity. Thus, Olonkho became one of a few unique samples of traditional cultures of the peoples of the world, which currently include less than a hundred samples.

After recognition of the national epos as international property, several major political decisions were taken in the Sakha Republic. Firstly, in order to develop Olonkho, President of the Republic issued a decree to declare “The Decade of

Olonkho (2005 – 2015).” Secondly, the government adopted a target program “Conservation, Development and Distribution of Olonkho Epos”. In connection with these processes, we can say that Yakutia is undergoing Folk Renaissance. Interest to the epos and history of its existence has increased dramatically among the population.

2. Material and Methods

The material for this article was the text of the Yakut epos Olonkho, as well as the research of the scientists, devoted to the analysis of this text as a cultural phenomenon, for example, the works of A. P. Reshetnikova, M.T. Gogoleva, A. P. Okladnikov.

In addition to it, we also used the material, obtained by the scientists, post graduate and undergraduate students during the expeditions to the village of Hordogoy of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) in 2012. Expeditionary trips were implemented with the support of KGAU “Krasnoyarsk Regional Fund for support of scientific and scientific and technical activities”.

The results presented in this article were obtained with the help of such general scientific methods of research as description, comparison, and analysis.

During the expeditions the method of field research was used. Besides that, the methods of observation, in-depth and expert interviews, questionnaires and comparative analysis were used to obtain the material contained in the article.

The basic theoretical approaches, which were used for writing this article are the following: first of all, linguistic and cultural method of analysis, that allows to discover the relations between the norms of behavior, thinking and language in the life of people, one of the founders of which is B. Whorf (Whorf, 1956); secondly, social constructivism, which allows to interpret cultural phenomena as methods of constructing social processes.

3. Results

In their research many Yakut scientists have adopted the evolutionary theory about the common origin of the world epos. According to this conception, epic genre developed worldwide strictly according to the stages of cultural development, which, owing to similarity of content, can be divided into “archaic” and “classic”.

In this classification, the Yakut Olonkho is referred to the archaic type of epos, emphasizing its importance as an ancient relic of folk culture. Moreover, a renowned scholar E. M. Meletinsky (Meletinsky, 1998) even presented it as an exceptional sample, a standard of ancient epos. It clearly has all the characteristics of the archaic type:

1) The past is viewed as history of “real people”, of the human race in general;

2) Epic time is presented as a mythical era of creation, the origin of life on earth;

3) A certain dual system of “friends” and “foes”, human and demonic is obligatorily present. This struggle is a concrete expression of protection of cosmos from the forces of chaos. “Enemies” are mostly chthonic, i.e. they are associated with the Underworld, death, disease, etc., while a “friendly” tribe is localized in the Middle World (Meletinsky, 1998).

Olonkho is also characterized by monumentality, heroic pathos, fantastic nature, some idealization of communal and tribal relations and norms, mythologizing poetics, i.e. the qualities that allow it to belong to the highest achievements of folklore and be the subject of legitimate pride of the Sakha people.

The age of the epos is not defined precisely. There are considerable differences in the opinions of the researchers. The approximate time boundaries of origin of Olonkho will differ considerably depending on the choice of the scientific approach and the opinion of historians (A. N. Okladnikov, L. N. Gumilyov, M. P. Grjaznov etc.) or specialists in epic literature (I. V. Pukhov, G.U. Ergis, N.V. Emelyanov, etc.).

For example, if in the first place we pay attention to the genre features of the epos and compare it with other legends of South Siberian peoples, the age of olonkho can be estimated as dating back to the first millennium BC. If we consider the starting point of olonkho to be the formation of Sakha as an independent ethnic group and view it as a nationwide phenomenon (A.I. Okladnikov, I. V. Konstantinov, A. I. Gogolev), then it dates back to the XIV-XVI centuries. The appearing of olonkho is also associated with the period of the final dissolution the East-Turkish Khaganate in 745. It is this date that made it possible to consider its age to be 1250 years since the beginning of the second millennium. The study of olonkho in the context of Turko-Mongolian cultural integrity was started by such researchers as G.V. Ksenofontov, A.P. Okladnikov, G. U. Ergis etc., who emphasized a genetic link of the Yakut epos with other epic traditions of the peoples of the Southern Siberia, Baikal and Mongolia.

However, there is another view among many Yakut scientists, and especially among ordinary people of the Sakha Republic, according to which, basing on the plot of the epos, its age can be counted as 3000 years, in which case Olonkho is, perhaps, the oldest epos in the world.

Attempts to determine the exact date of the origin of the epos Olonkho are very important for Yakuts. Nowadays this ethnic group is actively

positioning itself as a unique people, who made a significant contribution to the history of the human race. As evidence they provide the results of archaeological, ethnographic, genetic and other research, which contain the appropriate conclusions. Linguists, literary scholars and folklorists also work in this direction, because proving ancient origin of olonkho can finally confirm this hypothesis.

In general, the epic tradition of Olonkho greatly affects the ethnic identity of Yakuts. For them it is not just a distinctive genre of folklore, but also a great treasure, containing the history of the people, their character and soul. According to the researcher V. M. Nikiforov: "Olonkho can be regarded as "a banner" of ethnic mobilization, a marker of awakening of Yakut ethnicity".

Ethnicity is manifested in olonkho several times – in the special manner of performing (in a singsong voice, using throat singing, traditional for Yakut musical culture), presentation of the epic to the listeners (a kind of a theatrical performance in national costumes), and most importantly, through the actual content of the epos.

In order to describe the manifestations of ethnic features of world perception of Yakuts, we will, first of all, turn to the content of the main stories of the epos.

Studying the oldest story of Olonkho – the legend of "Er-Sogotokh", E.M. Meletinsky in his article "About the most ancient type of the hero in the epos of the tyurko-Mongolian people of Siberia." (Meletinsky, 2010) reveals the image of the hero, who has the best features of his family. The researcher notes that the hero has all the features of the progenitor of the people and even of the humanity as a whole, as people as such did not exist before him. The time when he appears, is connected with the creation of the world:

"On the distant summit of the past years,
On the tempestuous ridge of previous years,
When Yakuts had not been born yet"
(Meletinsky, 2010).

This initial time is sometimes referred to as the perfect "golden age" - the beginning of all beginnings. This is the time of active actions of ancestors, which predetermined the subsequent order; it is the time, which shows the dawn of national history.

The place where the hero of Olonkho appears is presented as the best place on earth: it is not just a land of plenty with wonderful pastures for livestock and hunting grounds, but, as the scholar notes, "the original ecumene" of human tribe — who are, according to Olonkho, –Yakuts.

Er-Sogotokh (meaning "single") is the first inhabitant of this world, which is between heaven and

hell, who does not know where he came from, "whether he fell from the sky or came out of the ground", who his parents are. Having turned for help to the sacred tree, which Er-Sogotokh calls "spirit-grandmother", the hero discovers that he is a lone bogatyr (strongman), grown inside the tree.

The great goddess, who emerged from the sacred tree, tells Er-Sogotokh about his great mission, that the supreme god-creator Yuryun Aar-Tojon himself put the hero-bogatyr down to earth, "so that he bore children, gave life to the people and became the progenitor of the human tribe". The goddess gives the hero water of life and tells him to get ready and set out in search of the woman that is intended for him. As he was told by the spirit, having overcome a lot of difficulties and having defeated a lot of demons, the bogatyr asks in marriage the hand of the daughter of Khara Khan's, living in a far-away country, where earth and heaven meet. Having married the girl, Er-Sogotokh returns home.

"He bore children
Became the progenitor of Yakuts and
People say, he is still alive, he eats and
drinks" (Meletinsky, 2010).

Thus, the ancestor of the Yakut ethnic group is considered a hero is a man with superhuman abilities, moreover, of divine origin. For example, in other variants of this Olonkho it is even said that Yuryun Aar-Tojon is the "grandfather" of Er-Sogotokh, sometimes – his "father". The wife of the hero also has an unusual origin. She comes from the place, connecting heaven and earth, her father has the title of Khan. Consequently, the qualities of Er-Sogotokh and his wife were passed down to their blood children – the people who they bore. Hence, Yakuts are descendants of the royal race, and the gods themselves destined them to be "nisi-sakha", that is a great nation.

Also in the epic saga of "Er-Sogotokh", the appearance and traits of character of the hero are clearly described. In the classic version of olonkho, recorded by S.V. Yastremsky in 1895, it is said that the hero was "good-looking and brave", stately and important, strong and simply extraordinary. His appearance fully reflects his inner world — strong character and a beautiful heart. This feature is very common in the epic legends, distinguishing the people as the best, most wonderful and the strongest in the world.

The activities of the hero Er-Sogotokh, who is organizing his life, are also described. He builds a huge tent (yurta) of 80 fathoms in circumference, with 40 windows of pines in 7 rows, he builds a hearth, stone bunks (nary), etc., breeds animals, obtains fire for the first time by drilling a hole in the trunk of a dry birch, organizes the spring koumiss

festival *ysyakh* (in honor of the good gods of *ajyy*), for which he slaughters the cattle, cooks and eats meat, but he feasts alone, since there is no one around. Such actions, especially obtaining fire are the most important deeds for a hero. He creates culture, organizes and arranges everything around. *Er-Sogotokh* is a “cultural hero”. The features, characteristic of the spiritual life of Yakuts, can be traced in his activities: traditional rites of life cycle, military, shamanic rituals (Reshetnikova, 2007).

The world-famous researcher A. P. Okladnikov even compares “*Er-Sogotokh*” with the biblical Adam, “but with the only difference that the image of the biblical hero corresponds to the later epoch, when there already appeared the notion of the humanity” (Meletinsky, 1998).

Thus, epic heroes-bogatyrs *Olonkho* were created by God and were destined for the physical world with the specific purpose - to “bear children, give life to later descendants, to arrange fate of future people”.

Sometimes in *Olonkho* there are heroes, put down to earth by gods, who are not “lonely”. An illustrative example is *Nyurgun Bootur*. Unlike the legends of heroes- progenitors such epics demonstrate that a hero-warrior is a chosen one, fighting for the good of his people. Cleansing the land of monsters -*abaasy* can be regarded as a special “divine” mission of *Bootur*, to keep earth in order, to protect all the peoples living on it – “to defend sunny uluses, to protect people”.

In the epos, heroes-warriors oppose “enemies”, “strangers”, “demons” (while in the background of the epos there may appear other mythical worlds and tribes). Fighting them is a concrete expression of defense of cosmos from the forces of chaos.

In such stories of *Olonkho*, archaic beliefs become evident according to which Yakuts are not descendants of other nations, rather they are the first nation. Actions take place not in the mythological and cosmogonic background, but in a quite real historical and geographical one. That is why, in modern Yakutia there are a lot of researchers and amateurs, going into expeditions in search of the place, where the Sakha people appeared.

The historical authenticity of the texts of *Olonkho* is doubted mainly by researchers – representatives of other ethnic groups, who believe them to be the result of legendary, even mythological consciousness, created by the Sakha, fairytales with clearly manifested fantastic features and motifs. However, for local scientists it is a kind of an artifact, containing the secrets of origin of the people, their mental dominants and concepts. Practically all of

them believe in reality of some specific characters of *olonkho* as ethnic leaders, the leaders of the nation.

Hence, it is important to refer to the performing tradition of working with *Olonkho* – this aspect reveals features of self-presentation of the people, placing the emphasis in those places that are difficult for understanding for outside researchers or culture carriers themselves, who simply read the epos, but become especially significant in its verbal presentation - namely, in the genre of songs.

A very valuable research was made by Reshetnikova A. P. (Reshetnikova, 2007), who studies the song styles in *Olonkho*, their role and meaning in the epos. The central place in the ethnic sound ideal of Yakuts belongs to the elevated style of drawling songs *djieretii yrya*, the integral part of which is specific falsetto overtones *kylyhakh*, characteristic only of singing of Yakuts. This style was used to express requests, prayers, complaints, argumentations, and, in general, any references to a sacred intended recipient in ritual practice.

In *Olonkho* this song style marks “friends/insiders” – all positive characters of *olonkho*, directly reflecting the style of singing of white shamans – intermediaries between humans and deities in traditional rituals. In this style was sung the direct speech of not only representatives of *ajyy ajmag* (epic self-name of Yakuts): the hero, his bride, their relatives – but also good deities *ajyy* of the Upper World, and *ichchi* – spiritual masters of the Middle World, patronizing people, that are *ajyy*, too (style A). The enemies of *ajyy* tribe never (!) sing in this style. Stylistic origins of songs of male characters of the Underworld: bogatyrs (strongmen) *abaakhy*, spirits–masters of fiery seas, mountain passes, battlefields, which are sung in a particularly low, gruff voice, are presented in a narrative imitation of the style of dark shamans *kuturuu* (style B). In *kamlanie* (shamanistic ritual) this voice was used by a shaman’s immediate spirits–helpers — also *abaakhy* – who “spoke” in the shaman’s voice. This epic style of singing has no special musicological name; Reshetnikova A. P. calls it the epic style of *abaakhy* or the narrative imitation of *kuturuu*. While the song styles of *ajyy* and *kuturuu* are multi-genre, definite song formulas can be clearly seen in the fundamentally different from each other musical characteristics of *olonkho* comic characters: maids-*abaakhy* (sisters, mothers of a bogatyr from the Underworld), a slave-herdsman *Soruk Bollur*, a slave-cowgirl *Simekhsin Emeekhsin* – which is created by narrators in *degeren yrya* style. The expressed difference of the songs of these, mostly episodic, characters (who are not *ajyy*!) complements the main contrast of A – B in the “friends” – “foes”

opposition with the contrast of spheres A – C (where C stands for degeren yrya). (Reshetnikova, 2007)

It should be noted that not every line in Olonkho is sung. Reshetnikova A. P. marks the plot

lines in the epos, where song sections appear obligatory. This is shown in Table 1 (Reshetnikova, 2007), presenting the sung parts of Olonkho and corresponding ceremonies.

Table 1. The sung parts of Olonkho and corresponding ceremonies (Reshetnikova, 2007)

Parts of Olonkho which are sung	Forms of genre-intonation expression in ritual folklore
1. Request for children by childless spouses	
1. A song – appeal of childless old people to the Supreme deity Yuryung Ajyy Tojon, pleading to sending them a child (the future hero of the epos). Singing style – A.	1. A song-appeal of a childless woman to the goddess of fertility Ajyyhyt. This ceremony could take place with the mediation of the shaman. Singing style – A.
2. Seeing – off Ajyyhyt	
2.1. A thank-appeal (A) of a mother (sometimes a father) of a future strongman to Ajyyhyt after the successful birth of the hero.	2.1. A song (A) in the rite of seeing-off Ajyyhyt is sung by an elderly woman with the request not to bypass this family.
3. Giving name	
3.1. A song- appeal (A) of a solitary hero to the spirit-master of earth, dwelling in the sacred tree, with the request to inform him about his origin, name and mission. 3.2. The answer of the spirit –master of earth giving name to the hero. (A).	3.1. A spoken (S) appeal of parents to a person who is in possession of the gift of eloquence with the request to bless the child. 3.1.2. Sacred trees were appealed to (A/S) in different life situation. 3.2.1. Algysy for giving name to a child can still be heard at family feasts. (A). 3.2.2. Elderly people lay near the cradle, pretending to be asleep, then “woke up” and sang incantatory songs of a happy future of the child, allegedly seen in the dream. (A).
4. Indicating the intended bride	
4. An appeal of a hero to the spirit-master of earth or his parents with the request to indicate the intended bride (A). Their answers (A).	4.1. Matrimonial desires were usually expressed by allegorical texts in spoken (S) form. 4.2. The answer of the young man’s parents about the recommended bride. (S)
5. Sacrifice to spirits-masters of the house, mountain passes, seas etc.	
5.1. A song-appeal of heroes (A) to the spirits – masters of fire, yurta, tethering posts, before setting out. 5.2. A respectful appeal of the hero with a sacrifice of horse hair to the spirits-masters of mountain passes, battlefields, the Fiery Sea (A).	5.1. Similar everyday life appeals to the same intended listeners with the request to protect the family in the absence of the speaker. (A). 5.2. In everyday life, appeals with similar sacrifice are traditional, in order to ask for protection on the road (A): to the spirits-masters of the river (before crossing it), a mountain pass (after successfully achieving it).
6. Military rituals	
6.1. Summoning the daughter of the deity of war Ilbis Kyyha by the heroes ajyy (A). Grateful sacrifice to Ilbis Kyyha after winning (A). 6.2. A fight song - a challenge to a duel, outlining the reasons for the call, expressing contempt for the enemy and self-praising: by the heroes-bogatyr ajyy – in style A, by bogatyr abaahty - in style B. 6.3. A song-advice of a warhorse in a critical situation 6.4. Dying songs of heroes of ajyy and abaahty (A / B).	6.1. There existed certain rituals both before the fight, and after the victory. 6.2. This rite is not possible to reconstruct. Nevertheless, Tuvinians and Mongols still have a custom nowadays – before a wrestling match the seconds sing, praising their fighter and belittling the merits of the opponent 6.3. Relic totemic belief in animal – ancestor – werewolf possessing human speech. 6.4. Dying songs – laments of people – suulanyy yrya (A).
7. Wedding	
7.1. Songs-presentations of grooms ajyy in which they tell their name, place of origin, which their parents are (A). 7.2. Name songs-presentations of abaahty (B). 7.3. Lamenting of a girl aiyy, whose hand is asked in marriage by abaahty: farewell to the Middle World, request for protection (A). 7.4. Algysy of parents of newlyweds	7.1. The tradition of “personal” songs is characteristic of folklore of neighboring peoples – Yukagirs, Chukchi, Evens. Judging by the stable song formulas of epic heroes, Yakuts were aware of this genre. 7.2. This genre is clearly represented in the songs-“arrivals” of spirits- helpers of black shamans during the shamanistic ritual of kamlanie. 7.3. Wedding songs of brides saying goodbye to their homes, which they will never see again. (A). 7.4. A similar phenomenon in everyday life is a complete musical and poetic analogy.
8. Performance of messengers’ songs	
8.1. Songs of a male messenger Soruk Bollura (C). 8.2. A message of a stuttering slave cowgirl Simekhsin Emeekhsin (C). 8.3. Songs of heavenly messengers (A)	8.1. The folklore prototype is buffoonery tongue twisters chabyrgakh (C) 8.2. In shamanistic arsenal there is a comic character – a stuttering spirit-helper Keeleeni (C). 8.3. In shamanistic ceremony “answers” of ajyy deities were sung by white shamans (A).

The style of singing with *kylysakh* (with falsetto overtones), characteristic only of Yakuts, corresponds to the ethno-musicological concept of “ethnic sound ideal”. As it was stated earlier, it is mostly manifested in the epos of *Olonkho*, which is called “a one-man theatre”, where all direct speech of the characters is sung.

The relevance of Yakut folklore and its importance for the modern man is analyzed by Gogoleva Marina Trofimovna in her thesis entitled “Studying of genre specifics of the Yakut folklore in a context of modern literary education of school students” (Gogoleva, 2009). The author notes that the forming potential of folklore, its universal humanistic ideas, artistic and aesthetic values should be used in formation of personality of the younger generation at the present stage of reevaluation of values, when the conditions of life in the modern society demand the basis for mutual understanding in the inter-ethnic, inter-cultural dialogue. The Yakut folklore as a phenomenon of artistic reflection of the systemic picture of the world and constructing public relations has a large arsenal of tools for self-education and self-realization of a person in different periods of formation of his personality.

Thus, it appears that the epos *Olonkho* is not only a sample of literary art, but also a kind of encyclopaedia of music in which all the variety of styles of Yakut ethnic music is presented. Currently, the musical tradition of Yakut people are preserved and revived: by Yakutsk Music College, named after M. N. Zhirkov, The Bolshoy Concert Hall, as well as by active educational activities of Music and Folklore Museum of Yakutia, opened in 1990.

4. Discussions

Ethnicity is manifested in *Olonkho* several times – in the special manner of performing (in a singsong voice, using throat singing, traditional for Yakut musical culture), presentation of the epos to the listeners (a kind of a theatrical performance in national costumes), and most importantly, through the actual content of the epos (Kirko et al., 2011; Koptseva, 2014; Koptseva et al., 2013; Neskryabina O.F., 2012; Kovtun, 2008).

According to the concept of constructivism, ethnicity is a product of activity of the intellectual elite: scientists, people of art, religious leaders and politicians (Koptseva and Sereckina, 2013, Luzan, 2011; Libakova and Sertakova, 2014; Krivolap, 2011). The art of music plays an important role among the mechanisms of construction of ethnicity. Music is the most suggestive art form; it has the ability to influence the emotional-volitional sphere of human psyche. Therefore, the art of music can be

called, on the one hand, one of the most effective mechanisms of formation of ethnos, while, on the other hand, it complements and enhances the action of other mechanisms: religion, non-musical arts, sports, mass media, education and even hygiene and medicine. Musical art accompanies man from the moment of birth until the last moment of earthly life (Kolpetskaya O.Y., 2014; Voivykevich S.G., 2014).

The song-performing part of *Olonkho* is a special language, “spoken” by Gods and the entire Universe. Having mastered the musical language, a man gains the ability to build a bridge between the mundane and the sacred worlds, engage in dialogue with the absolute beginning. For traditional cultures religion is one of the most important forms of culture that preserves integrity of the ethnic group, regulates relations between family members, as well as society (Ilbeykina, 2013; Sereckina, 2014).

Any socially meaningful action or social fact (using the terminology of Durkheim) is accompanied by voice or instrumental performance, which sets the emotional tone of the entire proceeding, underlines its importance and boundaries. In the process of performing collective social actions, the society shows internal solidarity and identifies itself in relation to other peoples.

Musical accompaniment sets the rhythm and pace of actions: shamanic rituals, a military parade, labor actions, domestic chores, wedding and funeral rituals, etc. The characteristic feature of music art is that it has temporal characteristic – music exists as long as it sounds. And this feature allows setting the boundaries of accompanied actions – music relates both to the form and content of social actions. Like any other mechanism of formation of ethnos, music enhances solidarity of society, establishing and maintaining relations of individuals, who form the community, called ethnic group. Every nation has its own special language of music, song style, musical instruments, which, like other features of ethnic culture, on the one hand, differentiate this group from others, and, on the other hand, are at the same time symbols of unity of individuals within the ethnic community.

Based on the above said, we can draw the following conclusions:

Heroic epos *Olonkho* is perceived by Yakut people not just as an ancient legend, but as a kind of universal creation, combining the characteristics of: 1) a masterpiece – an epic work of folk art; 2) a historical document; 3) a sacred text.

Moreover, the Yakut heroic epos *Olonkho* is a unique phenomenon of concentration of genetic memory, ideology, philosophy, poetic language, song and spoken narrative tradition that preserved the

cultural identity of Yakut people for centuries. Both the content of Olonkho legends and their performance by olonkhosuts are in a harmonious combination that makes the epos a standard, representing the national spirit and character of the inhabitants of Sakha. Studying it, we can understand the essence of the ethnic group, its possibilities and expectations.

Today, Olonkho is in unprecedentedly great demand among all Yakuts – from the perspective of consolidation of Yakut ethnos and enhancing ethnic identity it appears to be the very model, which is necessary for the younger generation's successful development and flourishing of its historical destiny.

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