

EPOS AND AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL OF SAKHA PEOPLE

ЭПОС И ДРЕВНИЙ ПРАЗДНИК НАРОДА САХА SAHALAR'IN

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates historical-cultural interpretations of real but over time forgotten events related to heroic epos-*olonkho* and ancient feasts-*isseakh* of Sakha people. Destination of *Aii* God, composition structure of *olonkho*, sacred content of round dance *osuokhai* and blessings *algys* are revealed. We compare collective perfections archetypes of *olonkho* and *isseakh* concerned with ancient cult *Aii*. Primary concern of narrators-*olonkhosuts* and their style of performing *olonkho* are elicited. *Olonkho*, *osuokhai* and *algys* are indispensable constituency of present-day Yakut feasts.

Keywords: *Olonkho*, *osuokhai*, *algys*, Heavenly *Aii* Gods.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье исследуются историко-культурные интерпретации реальных, но забытых с течением времени событий, связанных с героическим эпосом-*олонхо* и древним праздником народа саха-*ысыах*. Раскрываются предназначения небесных божеств-*айыы*, композиционная структура *олонхо* и сакральное содержание танца *осуохай*, а также благословения-*алгыс*. Сопоставляются коллективные представления-архетипы *олонхо* и *ысыах*, связанные с древним культом *айыы*. Выявляется особая роль сказителей- *олонхосутов*, и их стилей исполнения эпоса. *Олонхо*, *осуохай* и *алгыс* являются непременными составляющими современных якутских праздников.

Ключевые Слова: Олонхо, Осуохай, Алгыс, Небесные Божества Айыы.

ÖZET

Makalede Saha- Isıların eski ve kahramanlıkla ilgili ama günümüzde unutulmuş olan *Olonho* destanın tarihi-gerçek olayları incelenmiştir. Gök tanrıları olan – *Aiyu'nun*, *Olonho'nun* kompozisyon yapısı, *Osuhay* dansının dinsel anlamı, hayır dua olan *Algıs'in* anlamları açıklanmıştır. *Aiyu'nun* kadim kültüne bağlı arketip olan *Olonho* ve *Isiah'in* toplumsal ifadeleri karşılaştırılmıştır. *Olonhocuların* özel rolü ve söyleme tarzı belirlenmiştir. *Olonho*, *Osuhay* ve *Algıs* günümüz Yakut Bayramları'nın ayrılmaz parçalarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Olonho*, *Osuhay*, *Algıs*, Gök Tanrıları *Aiyu*.

Olonkho-epos¹ is an ancient object of history and culture of Sakha people. It is the whole spiritual, historical and cultural system, where ancient historic events, people's creation, ethic and esthetic views of the Sakha people had been interlaced. These images of the "objective spirit" by V.Diltay are the display of intellect and unity of culture world, proposing reflective forms. Understanding, intuitive penetrations, "feelings", "livings", are very important meanings on interpretation of the past culture (Diltay, 1995: 9).

Wonderful models of the epos and folklore have been kept in the depths of the Yakut culture, where the man took new feelings for the spiritual growth. Heroic character of *Olonkho*, the way of performing unique narrator- *olonkhosuts*, melodious, recitative language, all these signs are the epos signs in which there are generalized huge historic experience of Sakha people in the artistic forms of unusual force and this generalization is one of the essential signs of epos. During centuries heroic epos was passed from generation to generation, preserved and reproduced by heart. It was impossible simply to know *olonkho* by heart, it was necessary to live into the image, to put in the part of its own spirit. Just, that is why narrator- *olonkhosuts* were surrounded with special honor, now, they are used by huge respect among people. Masters- narrators are never learn by heart the texts, they have no ready poems, they "live" in epos. These great improvisers, having beautiful voices, musical and artistic talents, being able to reproduce by their voices emotional character of events – triumph, joy, sorrow. The Sakha people remember the names of well-known *olonkhosuts*: M.N.Androsova-Ionova, I.N.Vinokurov-Tabakhyrov, S.A.Savvin-Kyokhaian, S.A.Zverev-Kyyil Yola, N.A.Abramov-Kynat and etc.

Performing of *olonkho* is closely connected with the rituals and traditions of the Sakha people. Yakut *olonkhosuts* were honorable guests during summer festival *isseakh*, weddings. Often *olonkho* performed at night, when people, finishing their business, with pleasure listened masters- narrators. Grateful listeners can be immersed in the world of the heroic poems.

The first collectors and investigators of folklore and *olonkho*: S.A.Novgorodov – the author of the first ABC-book "Sakhaly suruk-bychyk" and reader «Aagar kinige», where with works of Russian writers there were 20 epic works and examples of the ritual poems, these works were the first popular accounts of oral folk works; A.E.Kulakovsky – outstanding Yakut ethnographer, folklorist, the author "Uraankhai Sakhalar" and "Elleyaada", S.V.Yastremsky, one of the first investigators of *olonkho*, writing "Examples of the Sakha folk literature", P.A.Oiunsky – the founder of the Yakut soviet literature, scientist-philologist, recreated "Niyrgun Bootyr Stremitelny", A.A.Popov – well-known ethnographer, the author of "Yakutsky folklore", "Dolgansky folklore", G.U.Ergis – scientist- folklorist, the author of "Ocherky po Yakutskomy Folkloru", I.V.Pukhov – Yakut – folklorist, the author of long standing works "The ideas and examples of *olonkho* by D.M.Govorov "Myuldiu Bege" and "Yakut heroic epos *olonkho*. The main examples", folk writer D.K.Sivtsev-Suorun-Omolloon, folklorists: S.I.Bolo – well-known folklorist and collectioner of Sakha oral folk works, the author of the collection "Historic legends and stories of Yakuts"., A.A.Savvin – collectioner of the folklore and ethnographic materials, and some other scientists.

¹ In 2005 UNESCO have declared *olonkho* – the heroic epos of the Sakha people as a nonmaterial masterpiece of mankind.

Epos is created during decomposition of the tribal system. This is the collective creation of the whole people. Epos describes the ideal life, ideal heroes. People stand up for family values. They actively fight for their happiness. And although writing sources are nothing proving realization by Yakut people their unity, epos eloquently testifies it. Singing the praises of feat of the first inhabitants of the Middle world, defenders of the tribe, and being the expression of self-awareness and self-feeling of the tribe, clan, *olonkho* supports the interests of the tribal solidarity, peaceful creative life of the tribe.

The compositional structure of *olonkho* subject is identical in all stories and consists of the next main parts:

1. Exposition: the epic beginning – description of the country, in which the Hero lives, description of the Sacred Tree; description of the hero's dwelling, his riches, his arms; the Hero's portrayal.

2. Plot: the ground for the epic campaign or feat.

3. Development of the action: the epic campaign, getting over the obstacles.

4. Culmination: fighting with the enemies, victory over him, epic contest and struggle during Heroic seeking in marriage.

5. Further development of the action: reverse way of the Hero to his country; getting over the difficulties in his way and intrigues of the conquered enemies and their kinsfolk.

6. Denouement: return of the Hero to his country and traditional final lines as the main Hero with his wife (kinsfolk, children) happily and richly live till nowadays, increasing the Kin of Uaankhai Sakha (Emelyanov, 1980: 5,11-12).

Epos is beginning from the description of the Primordial Ocean – Araat Baigal, which was disposed to the western part of the domicile of the Hero of the Aii tribe and represented Mythic Sea, although some of Sakha consider, that possibly narrators- *olonkhosuts* thought of Lake Baikal.

As to the life of the epic Gods, *olonkhosuts* intend, that everything has its own destiny: Gods, any natural or social appearance, all sorts of thing, at last every man. The fate of the God defines his functions, “sphere of activity”, the degree of the power and the place in the hierarchy of Gods.

The Sakha people honour Aan Alakhchyn Khotun – the patroness all the alive and all the growing. Her inhabitant – the Magic Tree Aal Luup Mas. The image of this Tree in the epic consciousness of the people represents the symbol of Cosmos, Immortality and Cognition. It embodies the archetype the ideal image of vegetation as a whole (Elyade, 2000: 325). The Sacred tree Aal Luup Mas joins all three Worlds – the thinking and moral Creature, which care about welfare the whole living in the Middle World. The life-giving moisture of the abundance drips from its branches. Near foot the white milky Lake-the symbol of the World Ocean is growing white. When the entrails of the Tree are opened the beneficial God-Mistress of the Natural Boundary-Universe, blessing the Hero. This Tree is the bright image of Heaven Grace, Happiness and Abundance. The Roots of the Tree go down till the Lower World, from there being frightened, arched grow backwards, in order to serve as the Pillar for hanging crockery with creams for Master and Mistress, the Lords of the cattle. The peak of the mighty Tree reaches the bright country of Urun Aii Toyon and become his tethering-post (Istoria Yakutskoi ASSR, 262).

In the radiance Heavens of Urun Aii Toyon – The Lighting Creator – The Lord and his Majestic Ajyna Sier Khotun:

They gave rise at the beginning of the Times

The radiant tribe of Aii –

Beautiful bogatyr – sons,

Beautiful daughters,

With leashes behind their back

They live in sunny uluses.

Their stirring persons are shamans,

Udagans are serving for them (Niyrgun Bootur Stremitelny, 1957: 9]

“With sunny leashes behind their back” is the persistent epithet of the human tribe. This

Epithet goes back to the ancient Faith Aii, when it was considered, that the God – Sun rules by people with help rays – “leashes” and leads them along the way of Good, Truth and Beauty. Respectful and reverential attitude of people to the Sun-God one can see in the different appearances of life. During summer festival “*isseakh*”, blessings – *algys*, in the dance-song *osuokhai*, which is performing on to the direction of the movement of Sun.

The people believed the all-powerful Gods-Aii, in sacrifices, in attribution soul to the natural elements. In the Pantheon of Gods of Sakha people each God is responsible for some kind of human activity. The Supreme God in *olonkho*, mythology and ancient religion of Sakha people Urun Aar Toyon – the White Great Lord or Urun Aii Toyon – the White Creative Lord:

On the wide low circle

With eight layers, fiery white Heaven

On the peak of the three thiered

Clear Heaven...

In grey hair white, as milk,

In high cap from three sables,

Adorning diamond feather,

They say, he mounts the throne,

They say, he rules over,

The White Urun Aar Toyon.

And his splendid wife Adyna Sier Khotyn:

Like shining day,

Like radiant fire,

With the face, eclipsing The Sun,

With the cheeks clearer then silver,

Playing vivid blush,

As dawns and evening-glows... (Oiynsky, 1975: 9].

White Urun Aar Toyon and his splendid wife Adyna Sier Khotyn are the Gods, becoming the ancestors of “the Clear tribe Aii – Uraankhai Sakha”. The main Gods of the

Upper “abaahy” – monstrous and terrible Uluu Suoryn Toyon and “unrestrained fierce, angrily obstinate” Kuokhtuia Khotun, according their desire “there are countless number ruinously bloody deaths” (Oiyinsky, 1975: 733). From all honouring Gods Uluu Suoryn Toyon is the Spirit – the Master of the Lena rock carving Pillars and the God of the most powerful shamans (Новиков, 2001: 10).

Three Gods of Aii: Odun Khaan, Chyngys Khaan and Dylga Khaan Toyon looked after the

Fortune of people, the Kun Desegei Toyon was the God of horses and granted people for life and prosperity.

In *olonkho*, as in antiquity the Universe was interpreted as greatly meaningful, obligatory “personal mounting, however, directing no personal origin, that is the Fortune” [Losev, 1994: 230] – Dylga Khaan Toyon. Thus, it was considered, that the Heaven and the Earth have been appeared after White Urun Aii Toyon has called the council of the highest Aii – Uluu Toyon and Dylga Khaan Toyon. In this council the ancestor of the evil creature – “abaahy” did not take part in.

All the appearances of Nature, Heroes of *olonkho* are formed of majestic, fantastic images. The narrators of *olonkho* consider their country the focus of the Universe, and the other countries as outlying districts. *Olonkhusut*, his wonderful interpretations and performing of *olonkho* are realized in such art as the theatre. Theatre is a natural continuation of the traditions of *olonkho* – the Great “Theatre of the one actor”. *Olonkho* is organically embodied and synthesized with the idea of the theatre. Musical and dramatic realization of *olonkho* is characterized with original styles of the performing art: “dyeretii”, “toyuk”, “degeren”. Its are the foundation of the syncretic genre of *olonkho*, which is the school of the bringing up of the professional performers- *olonkhusuts*.

In *olonkho* after grand battles, winning devil forces, *aii* people arrange the Great Festival *issekh* – beautiful action, which acquired new meaning, now. If in the past it had religious and ritual notion, at present *issekh* is traditional, theatrical festival of summer meeting. Formerly *issekh* was a part of the reality, event, continuing vital process. But the reality, according to the representations of ancient peoples, consisted of the mutual actions visible and invisible worlds [1, c.41], their influence upon human existence. Once *isseakh* had religious content – treat and propitiation of gods that to gain over. The aim of *issekh* was not only to harmonize mutual action of people and nature, but to prove esthetic influence upon the participants of festival.

Especially there were solemn *isseakh*, connected in *Aii* cult. Its divided in 3 groups (Romanova, 1994: 160):

- *aii-isseakh* or *isseakh* with blessing. These *isseakhs* had patrimonial character and carried out the open air; *Urun Aii Toyon* was the object of blessing;

- *isseakhs* which were in *urasa* (in conical elm ornamental summer dwelling) in honor the main gods and sacred spirit of ancestors; the main ceremony was sprinkling by *kumis* (mare’s milk); only men took part in this ceremony;

- *isseakhs*, connected in cattle-breeding cult; *isseakh* of “the first foal *kumus*” by *Vilui Sakha* – *kumis* festival. These *isseakhs* were family festivals. The object of blessing was *Jesegei aii* – the God of horse cattle; *isseakhs* “upon ox”. The object of blessing was *Inakhsut Khotun* – The God of cattle-breeding. Especially there was interesting the

description of the ancient *isseakh* in *urasa*. The ceremony of calling the names of Main Gods, and especially respecting ancestors were carried out in *urasa* – summer elm dwelling (according to Ksenofontov).

The honorable place, which have taken possession of the arranger of the *isseakh* was over against the door, directing to the east of the Sun. Respected and of noble race guests were invited, but women and children had not allowed in. During ceremony nobody had right to pass through the door of *urasa*, where at first “the White” shaman had consecrated *kumis*, and than pronounced praying. The priest-assistant splashed *kumis* by special sacred wooden spoon for spirits of ancestors. The sacrifice of *kumis* to the *main Gods* was that shaman had held the *choron*-cup in his hands and named the Gods, calling them in order their importance (Romanova, 1994: 117).

It was supposed that the Gods must touch invisibly the sacred drink. In the sign that some drops of the drink- *kumis* spilled the going out fire, they light ritual fire. After the ceremony, divined, applied to ancestors with blessing to help them. Only after that ceremony, going out *urasa*, one could to touch lightly *kumis*².

Isseakh have had stable, carefully worked dramatic scenery. The investigator A.A.Biliukina has considered that it has had exposition, plot and denouement, development of the action, culmination and epilog as in drama. At that time each components of the ritual had been canonized. Ritual actions have had philosophically founded logical consequentialness. Through codified details of the subject there was opened the system of the view of an ancient sakha. *Isseakh* was well organized social cult festival. Many participants of the performance were the spectators of the surprising action, influencing an inner outlook, imagination and confession of the man. This ritual action strengthened faith of the man to the life, power of the people’s society and his union with the animating nature. In drama there were personages, imaginary generalizing human characters, their collision and the struggle of ideas, moving the world. Artificial solution of the conflict had given birth to clearing of spectators. If in the ritual the man in his faith relied on external help of the God’s power, that in drama through clearing he turned to his inner outlook, to his creative source. The common appearance of the ritual cult of *isseakh* and drama was its turning to spirituality of a man, to acknowledgment his high predestination in the world (Biliukina, 1992: 41).

Round dances were indefeasible part of the *isseakh*, dances-*ungky* with singing *osuokhai*, in which leader of a choir had pronounced every line of a song and repeating by dancing people. In his book “Aii kyhite” N.E.Petrov have been explained, that the word *ungky* is derivative from the verb *ung* – to pray, to worship, closely connected with the notions: *unguu-suktuu*, *suguruiuu-kerdehuu*, translated as prayer, solemn, respectful address and worship, request (Petrov, 2000: 7). As addressing to The Great God *Urung Aar Toyon* and other Gods, that they have blessed people on good things, directed in the preservation of the clan. *Osuokhai* – the dance of the worship to the Sun, when the performers, national singers, calling the names of *Aii*, had blessed them and requested Good and Welfare for the gathered people. As a rule, all the movements of the solemn processions, *osuokhai* dance, round song, all the ritual movements and others had happened in the direction of the Sun movement, or from the east to the west (for example, during consecration of a fire, sprinkling by *kumis* in the *balagan*-house, and others). To follow the

² Archives of the Yakut Scientific Center, Fund, 4, List, 1, File, 129, Page, 19-28.

Sun, according to the God's signs it means to get blessing from the heaven, to make according to ethic laws of the clan or tribe. How truthfully there were the words of M.Sheler, that, it was possible the Nature World (roughness and evil) and the World of Liberty (Culture) Morality might be separate if the Great Force of Beauty (Art's Force) had not connected its. The values have become "real" only in the Goods. In the valuable things its were not "real". In the Good Value is objective as a rule and real simultaneously. With each new Good there was taken place original development of the real World (Tugarinov, 1988: 52).

Olonkho-epos and *osuokhai*-circular dance you can imagine as "stopping past live", which is necessary to research in the integration of such sciences as history and culture.

Olonkho and *osuokhai* are coexistence as indestructible notions of cultural memory, spirituality and sociality, spreading its in cultural life of people.

The main thought, which have contained in the ancient yakut ritual was the worship the Heaven Gods *Aii* in which the motive of the blessing to pass through the dance, dancing plastics. The culmination of the dance was in the "flight to Gods *Aii*", when the participants of the dance have performed the jumps, trying to jump higher as it possible (Lukina, 1991: 18-23). Poetical rhythm of the *osuokhai* dance has served the foundation for new yakut songs and help to showing new talented performers of songs. Besides, *osuokhai* has been the testimony of the deep influence of the *Aii Doctrine*, which contained in its rhythms and songs. This unique archetypical model of the dance, has been like round dances of the other peoples in the world, including their respect and the worship Heaven Gods and as the original hymn to the Sun. In spite of the influence of the different cultures the *osuokhai* had preserved its original. Today the *osuokhai* has been the unique kind of the archaic round dance, which organically inscribed in the modern conditions "As an art intuitively has comprehended changes, occurring in the collective unconsciousness" (Yung, 1995: 31). An art – it is not simply the copy of the reality, but it is creative thought of the reality/ The objective reality must to pass through the man's spirit and to refract in it. Thoughts and feelings of the artist, his relation to the depicting life, inevitably impressed in the product of the art, representing as "elaborated", transformed image of the reality. This idea has been contained in the term "creativity" (Sheler, 1996: 293).

According to the historical traditions the first festival-*isseakh* in *Tyumaada land* was organized by *Elley Bootyr*, where he had been pronounced the words of *algys* – the blessing in the accompaniment of the dance- *osuokhai*, performing ceremony, which was the part of the yakut religion.

The ritual dance – *osuokhai*, excerpt its religious meaning; have created useful vibrations for the man's organism. Proving recovering effect, which takes away the tire, psychic stress, the ritual dance – *osuokhai* provided esthetic pleasure, giving optimism and energy, strengthened a sense of the ethnic community and the protection of the individual.

The dance-song – *osuokhai*, *olonkho*, *algys* are certain attributes of festivals of the modern sakha people. Very frequently in festivals, weddings, jubilees, social means there are invited "algystchyt"- the men, who has the gift of the performing ancient ceremonies, which they are performing in the new interpretations now.

In 2001 year it was built Artchy House – the House for the performing of the ceremonies of worship high Gods-*Aii*, simultaneously predestined for folklore festivals and fates. Every year there are organized competitions of the performers of *osuokhai*, children

meetings “*toiyuksyt*”- performers songs-*toiyuk*, festivals of national dance collectives, yakut songs “Etigen Khomus”- singing vargan, musical mysteries, devoted to the Great festivals.

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