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Pedagogics of Olonkho Spiritual Concept Sphere in Creation of the Culture

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Abstract

The article analyzes olonkho as fundamental source of wisdom and the teachings of the ancestors about the sensible life and humanism. In olonkho, we can see portrayals of high moral standards of sensible life, and traditional values, which were skillfully depicted using expressive means and stylistic devices of the Yakut language. Traditional values reflect the imaginative world view, a unique Yakut model of the world and life, which is specifically represented by an entire system of spiritual concepts of a philosophical understanding of the world creation and human life.

Many scholars highlight the important role that Platon A. Sleptsov – Oyunsky played in maintaining and popularizing olonkho. In the troublesome years of new political and government relations being established, owing to his efforts and outstanding organizational skills, he collected a valuable scope of olonkho stories from the first-hand source – the olonkho storytellers. Being a repository of philosophical and religious worldviews as well as of pedagogical and educational principles, today, these creative writings are in the center of researchers' attention.

The study of pedagogics and the methods of studying olonkho in schools began in the 1970s. Presently, the search for educators and methodologists in Yakutia is based on the studies of the leading Russian researchers – N.A. Rubakin, M.M. Bakhtin, N.S. Berdyaev, D.S. Likhachov, B.S. Gershunsky, G.D. Gachev, T.D. Polozova, etc. All these scholars regard the perception of language arts as a personal and deep mental process.

The following three concept sphere blocks were singled out: 1 – I am a small part of the Universe, 2 – I am a child of nature, 3 – I am an Aiy person and the creator of life. In this system, the spiritual concept sphere can lead the people step-by-step to learning about the vitally important values and to a deep understanding of their personal "I" and their inner spiritual world. We have proved the didactic necessity to educate students about olonkho in accordance with this concept system.

Keywords: Spiritual concept sphere, Human understanding of culture, Olonkho pedagogics, Spiritual and personal approach, Meaningful content of creative writing, Mental and spiritual human harmony with nature, World unity, Unity of human nature.

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Introduction

In olonkho, the Yakut world view, the world and life model is depicted in a unified system of a range of spiritual and moral concept of a philosophical understanding of the human life and the world in general. The olonkho concept sphere is recreated from the perspective of a human mental and spiritual harmony with the society (the Aiyv tribe) and nature. The spiritual and mental harmony can only be achieved through a deep immersion into the inner world of olonkho by reading it or listening it systematically. The inner world of olonkho is structured systematically with spiritual and mental concepts as well as the concept sphere.

In defining the term *concept sphere*, we quote the distinguished scholar, D.S. Likhachov who defines the concept sphere as “a unity of national concepts; it is built on all the potential concepts known to the native speakers” (Likhachov, 1993, pp.3-9).

The scholar leads us to a thought that the system of creative concepts in literature creates a concept sphere, which expresses the unique national worldview. Consequently, according to D.S. Likhachov, the written works of art of particular nations, known worldwide and bearing intellectual and spiritual concept through the centuries, represent the corresponding ethnic groups. Given this understanding of the term, we bring up to date the study of the spiritual concept sphere in epics as it represents a contemporary problem in pedagogics in terms of educating the growing generation about olonkho.

Discussion

The aim of the study is to single out the concept spheres in the heroic epic as it is a form of art containing the basic spiritual and mental value, which the students need to acquire on the individual spiritual level.

The following researchers’ theoretical approaches served as the methodological support in our research – M.M. Bakhtin, N.A. Berdyaev, B.S. Gershunsky, G.D. Gachov, who stated that the perception of creative writing is an individual and mental process, an existence within culture, a process of communicating with culture and “living” one’s life based on a creative piece of writing.

The individual and mental approach focuses the attention of the readers on the deep content and human values of creative writings; M.M. Bakhtin notes that “if painters see the main importance in the product of art, which they separated from themselves, or, in other words, a work of art, then for the viewers, listeners or readers the main product is themselves, their personality” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.216).

Hence, the specific features of perceiving the creating work of art are predetermined by the unique method, typical for art, the human spiritualization and development. This is an anthropocentric “path” and it only goes through art, only through the psychological structure of the character, only through their intricately complex and controversial spiritual world. This proves the point that the education effect of art is only achievable through a full understanding of and full immersion into the deep structures of the creative writing, through an understanding, compassion towards the thoughts and feelings of the fictional character. The deep meaningful content of olonkho is depicted through valuable and spiritual concepts, which structure the concept sphere of the text into a unique system.

Precisely by depicting the inner spiritual content of olonkho through the detection, bringing the intellectual and spiritual concepts up-to-date, a positive outcome can be achieved, which would help to understand how the human heart and mind function as well as fill the human heart with love towards humanity, life and nature.

The Pedagogical Importance of Olonkho

The olonkho of the Sakha people encompasses the entire intellectual and spiritual energy of the Sakha people, and reunites the permanently valuable traditions in world perception and worldview as well as the aesthetic, ethical dogmas of understanding the homo sapiens, a person of culture.

Olonkho has been existing for over a thousand years; it does not contain descriptions of the racial and tribal (in the traditional understanding of the word) as well as caste relations. The epic tells about the humankind (*aiyy aimaga*) striving to reach the domination of the mind, striving towards a pure spirit depicted in the form of the constant battle between the good and the evil, all for the sake of a happy life. Olonkho also reflects the eternal laws of existence, which manifest themselves in the human unity with nature. All these ideas are represented in olonkho through a depicting of the life and courageous feats of the main character – Aiyg bogatyr (the good bogatyr (warriors)).

In olonkho, the life journey of a bogatyr is depicted starting from his birth; moreover, even before his birth, starting from the point his spirit enters the bogatyr's body inside his mother's womb, his destiny is predetermined by the higher deity, the god Yurung Aar Toyon; the bogatyr is destined to become the defender of the people inhabiting the Middle World.

In olonkho, the birth of a future bogatyr, his first steps, actions and deeds are depicted in detail in accordance with the human stages of life. The birth of a bogatyr is of a special nature, this character is restless, he can run away from his house the minute he was born. In such circumstances, only the father has the power and strength to calm the insensible child. The father puts his child to his mother's breast, which is vital source of life, bringing forth the genetically stored destiny in him, which was passed on to him from the ancestors and predetermined by the supreme deity. If the father fails to hold the child back, he could escape. For example, in the olonkho by P. Burnashov titled *Kyys Debiliye*, one of the new-born bogatyr could not be stopped by his father; he runs off into the Middle World. The nursling ends up in a different and vicious whirlpool of life of the *abaasy aimaga* (the evil forces tribe), adopts this evil and starts destructing the world around him. Only through a great series of trials, spiritual and physical loss, and purgation, he retains the appearance of an aiyy tribe human and becomes the defender of the Middle World, who fulfills the mission he was predestined to complete by the supreme deity.

The olonkho plot further unfolds into a detailed description of the life path full of hardships in reaching spiritual harmony and a sensible life. Although, the fate of a bogatyr, the defender of the Middle World is predetermined and prewritten by Yurung Aar Toyon, the supreme deity. Quoting the olonkho titled *Nyurgun Bootur the Swift*, "everything – the mind and physical perfection as well as spiritual harmony with oneself, the nature and the society are reached by the aiyy bogatyr through hardships".

Only by successfully going through all the trials of life, the future bogatyr understands the knowledge of different levels and attains "the knowledge and traditions of three generations", learns the "eighty-eight methods and ninety-nine abilities" of life. Only when Nyurgun Bootur the Swift could attain the knowledge and traditions of the three generations, the supreme deities descend him into the Middle World to act as the defender of the *aiyy aimaga* tribe.

The examples listed above, showing the pedagogical value of olonkho on the example of the main character analysis, illustrate the pathway and methodology of engaging in and educating the children in the traditional pedagogics framework. The span of philosophical thought of the people is truly remarkable as well as its ability to reflect the philosophy and psychology of human life through expressive means used in creative writing. Precisely in this aspect, it is possible to understand the didactic nature of olonkho, which corresponds to the superior ideas and ideals of human life.

In the heroic bogatyr epic olonkho, we find the heritage of the mind, heart and people, the wisdom of life, the treasury of didactic ideas, which are transmitted through the native language, capable in its turn to bring out the love towards life and people. From one heart to another is the essence of olonkho didactics. It is only through the heart that the person can attain an unbreakable faith in the creative power of the good and benevolence.

The Role of P.A. Sleptsov – Oyunsky in Preserving and Popularizing Olonkho

Being genuinely irreplaceable, olonkho plays a significant role in the fate of the Sakha people and this was credited by Platon Alexeyevich Oyunsky. In the severe times of “snowstorms and bullets”, being an active participant of the struggle for freedom and a better life for the people, Platon Oyunsky managed to come to a timely decision to collect and preserve the samples of the heroic epic olonkho. Today, this scope of valuable creative writing material is regarded as an encyclopedia of knowledge and world representations about the nature and human life; Platon Oyunsky was a unique person who expressed the poetic language art talent of his people.

Platon Oyunsky was growing up surrounded by epic traditions and together with his mother’s milk he took in the traditions of his native culture, the philosophy of life, and the philosophy of a sensible person with high moral standards, one who can become a true defender and creator of happy life for the *aiyy aimaga* in the Middle World. All these aspects, manifested themselves later in his life; like the *aiyy bogatyrs*, Platon Oyunsky became a defender and creator of the Sakha people’s life. This is the main essence of olonkho pedagogics.

During the years of constructing a new life order and new types of relationships, when all the traditional assets of life were regarded as a thing of the past, Platon Oyunsky organized olonkhosut (olonkho teller) evening meetings, where they held lively discussion, shared their knowledge and olonkho-telling skills, performed olonkho, each playing particular character roles; naturally, all this made people believe in the value of olonkho as a specific school of life. In that time-period, the favorable folklore (epic) environment still existed, however, in the course of time, and being put under the pressure of new life changes, it was lost. Nevertheless, the creative works of Platon Oyunsky, gradually aroused interest in olonkho, when it was even proclaimed a masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage of the people.

Research Methods and Methodology

We used the following **research methodology**: the philosophical concept of spiritual language arts and culture priorities in the process of personal development of a child (M.M. Bakhtin, N.A. Berdyaev, V.I. Vernadsky, B.S. Gershunsky, D.S. Likhachov, etc.); a psychological and pedagogical understanding of the literary studies process as a creative and spiritual form of writer-reader interaction, which makes the inner language art content and personal development of the children more prominent (L.S. Vygotsky, T.D. Polozova, N.A. Rubakin, etc.).

Research methods: aesthetic-functional analysis of epic text from the point of view of distinguishing the spiritual concept sphere of olonkho; analysis, synthesis, and classification of the concept sphere in olonkho in accordance with the system of personal and spiritual development of a maturing individual.

In order to make full use of the epic work of art possibilities, there needs to be a search for reasonable ways and methods of describing the spiritual world of olonkho.

Only a close, textual, in-depth reading and listening of olonkho can arouse interest towards it in the mind of a growing person. Only then will the meaningful, deep, spiritual concepts of olonkho will begin to unravel themselves and be understood and only then the full scope of inner human abilities will manifest

itself. Studying the inner content of olonkho, the young students will have the opportunity to look deep into the thoughts and feelings of the main characters.

In fact, life experience shows that the best works of art are created by those who were able to open themselves to the inner world of olonkho and to take in its intellectual and creative energy. Yakut fictional literature, music culture and theatrical art, and painting were all inspired and created by the invigorating mental and spiritual strength of olonkho.

Theoretical Background for the Didactics of the Olonkho Spiritual Concept Sphere

Nowadays, it is considered that the humanity is losing the value of their personal "I". In pursuing material values, the false values of civilization, people step back from the true understanding of spirit and spirituality. Therefore, the famous philosopher, B.S. Gershunsky was absolutely right when he said that "the lack of proper attention to the greater values and goals of education, a passive perception of the life priorities, which occur sporadically in the society – is the practically the main flaw of modern education" (Gershunsky, 1998, p.22). The prominently visible mottos of spiritual values, attempts to arouse interest of the growing generation in the supreme ideal concepts of traditional wisdom are only artificially illustrated tools and they are inefficient without the methods of immersing oneself into the inner spiritual world of language art. Morality, spirituality, and genuine love of life can grow only from the inside, in the heart (or soul). Logically, the student preparation for acquiring the spiritual values is only possible upon reaching an inner dialog of thoughts and feelings between the olonkho characters and the young generation.

In this case, the following methodology of olonkho pedagogics suggested by N.A. Berdyaev, can be singled out: "culture never was and never will be distantly humanistic, it will always be specifically humanistic, i.e., national, individual or traditional and only in this quality is will be an integral part of the general scope of humanism. In culture, the national and generally humanistic aspects cannot be compared. The national genius intellect withholds the general humanistic properties, and through its individualistic features, it penetrates the universal sphere" (Berdyaev, 1990, pp.93-94). Only through the personally important acquisition of spiritual wealth of the native people, it is possible to understand and perceive the spiritual values, the general human importance of a peoples' culture.

It is also reasonable to mention here the thought expressed by M.M. Bakhtin that "a fictional text, which represents a fixed form of existence that established itself throughout the centuries, acquires the beginning stage of its existence once more if the author establishes a process of communication between him and the reader" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.37). Given this understanding, the scholar makes a conclusion that existence within culture and the communication within culture is in itself the communication and the process of living one's life on the basis of the fictional work of art. In his opinion, the cognition of any kind of text is the process of self-cognition; the text is the manifestation of the spirit. Self-cognition leads to understanding the essence of life and to the recreation of its spiritual and intellectual abilities.

As we can see, the points of view expressed by Russian scholars are similar; they regard the process of reading non-fiction as "a process of communicating and living someone else's life". They also regard it as a process of self-cognition, i.e., by understanding the text, the reader understands oneself.

In the older times, listeners immersed themselves deeper into the unfolding canvas of the word-and-imagery epic word, they felt and perceived the events of the plot in a real-time mode, they empathized to the feelings and emotions of the characters, attained the knowledge about the high standards of life ideals in olonkho, the depth and intricate nature of aesthetic and spiritual humanism requirements. All this helped to arouse the good and life-asserting thoughts and feelings in people.

Olonkho is multidimensional and diverse, however, all the links of its intellectual and spiritual components of the plot logically intervene in the trunk of the Tree of Life, which symbolizes unity and the diversity of the Universe (Kingkiniir kieng hallaan), three worlds (Us Doidu) and the supreme deity represented by Urung Aar Toyon. In this diverse world of olonkho, in the concentrated perception of the Tree of Life, we can clearly see the spiritual concepts, which, in our opinion, can give us insight into the methods of engaging the students into the inner world.

The symphysis of these concepts leads to the creation of a “third” general meaning, a deeper, more original one, surpassing the meaning of each component of the chain. G.D. Gachev suggests that it is the links of fictional concepts that form the language field and define the specific features of “the national worldview”, when each national group fills certain concepts with their own specific content and are characterized by unique connections with other concepts (Gachev, 1995).

Intellectual and Spiritual Olonkho Concept Sphere

The evaluation criteria of cognizing the nature of a spiritual human were established throughout the centuries by the genius mind of the people, i.e., olonkhosuts (olonkho tellers); they were systemized and reproduce the spiritual world which leads to a human understanding of such important aspects of human life as **“I am a part of the Universe”, “I am a child of nature”, “I am an Aiyy person, the creator of life”**. These fundamental philosophical notions lead people to an understanding of life values, and to a deeper understanding of oneself, and one’s personal spiritual world. On the one hand, these notions are global and Universe-oriented; on the other hand, they are vital, and lead to the inner world of the person; they are singled out by us as the core of the olonkho concept sphere.

The Yakut world view and the world model are combined from an entire range of moral and spiritual concepts and philosophical understanding of human life. The olonkho text creates a model of a non-existent world in general; it is reflected through the prism of consciousness, a specific opinion about the world and the way the people see it. For these reasons, the listener (spectator or reader) “looks” at the world through the prism of traditional consciousness, which represents a conventional model of the depicted world.

The spiritual concept sphere of olonkho comprises of three interconnected and interdependent concepts of thought and spirituality, which lead to a comprehension of the unity of the people with the Universe (cosmos), the unity of the people and nature, the unity and variety of the humankind.

1. Within the “I am a part of the Universe” concept, the young students can be taught the understanding of a biosphere, based on the teachings of V.I. Vernadsky. According to his studies, the biosphere is created under the influence of the Galaxy and the Sun; everything that exists within their range is interconnected and interdependent. In accordance with Vernadsky’s concept, the Earth is a living being, which is sustained by the solar energy and everything on the planet is interdependent. Holding research devoted to olonkho texts with school students in an attempt to single out the notions the Yakut people use when talking about the Galaxy, the three worlds, the creation of the Earth, its inhabitation by the humans, astronomic and geographical knowledge and representations etc. can help arouse a true interest for olonkho, not only as an example of language art, but also as a source of studying the scientific representations, views and knowledge of the people. From the pedagogical point of view, as a result of such research, the school students will come to an understanding that people are a part of the Universe, but, on the other hand, humans represent a worldview. The human understanding of their high calling as a creator of life on Earth as well as the understanding that they are a part of the Universe in their country, “Aan Iye Daidy” can help reach the triumph of life, good and justice.

The “I am a part of the Universe” concept sphere includes the following set of notions: *kingkiniir kieg hallaan (the Galaxy)*, *Yus Doidu (Three worlds)*, *Aiyy aimaga (Aiyy tribes)*, *abaasy aimaga (the abaasy tribe)*, etc. All these concepts are interconnected and governed by the laws of the Universe or Cosmos. The olonkho concept sphere depicts the humanity (Aiyy aimaga) striving, in general, towards the triumph of the rational, towards the pureness of the spirit illustrated as the fight of good against evil for a happy life; the olonkho concept sphere also reflects the perpetual laws of the Universe in the unity of nature and humans. In olonkho, everything is built as a harmonic structure, which is represented as a complex and self-developing system. The harmony of life is destructed by the Abaasy aimaga dark forces, which in terms of their position in the Universe are situated not only in a different direction, in a different cycle, but can also co-exist in a human being that had lost its humanity.

The spiritual olonkho concept sphere coincides with the value categories of the epic heritage of other peoples. Establishing a spiritual connection through a comparative analysis of the spiritual concepts of the epic texts of different nations, we can allow the school students to learn about the epic texts of other national groups. For these reasons, we point out the fact that the methodology of engaging the readers and helping them understand the epic content, needs to include an organized system, which is compliable with its fictional, dialog nature “from person-to-person”, “from heart-to-heart”, which is structurally intervened in the olonkho concept sphere. Such a process of understanding olonkho can give positive results in reconnecting the olonkho ideas with the epics of other nations. Only by doing so, the school students can reach **a full understanding of the world, the unity of the humans and nature and the universe in general.**

2. The “I am a child of nature” concept sphere. When overviewing and analyzing the olonkho in accordance with the “I am a child of nature” concept sphere, we understand that nature not only has a practical importance but also a spiritual one. “Nature is the macro-cosmos and humans are micro-cosmos”. In the epic, the human is not perceived as some unnatural form, not being a part of it or a contradictory force, on the contrary, humans are an integral part of nature.

Presently, the “human is a child of nature” and the “human is nature” olonkho concept spheres are interpreted as the concepts of “human unity with nature”, “an idea of unified ecosystem”, in which the Human being a homo sapiens and able to impact nature, holds the central and the key position.

The moral and spiritual concepts reflect the human (people’s) connection with nature, certain places, with which the human beings associate their unique national identity. In the process of learning about the verbal and poetical images of nature in olonkho, school students learn about the primeval beauty of nature, feel their connectedness to it; they also learn to analyze the system of philosophical, moral and esthetic human representations of the surrounding natural environment.

3. The “I am an Aiyy person, the creator of life” concept sphere defines the ideal aiyy person on many levels: “Kun kihite komuskes, aiyy kihite ahynygas” (the Human of the Sun – the defender of the tribe, the creator of life and all that is good).

The olonkho characters are well aware of how the world surrounding function and they follow the general laws of nature; all this helps the people to achieve their life goals and fulfill the mission they were destined to complete – to be the defender of the tribe, the creator of a good and sensible life. The olonkho characters are able to listen to their heart, they control their thoughts and actions, and their actions are governed by the beliefs of the aiyy people. The olonkho warriors’ battles are the battles of humans with their own dark side and in this perilous battle they overcome their inner flaws: fear, insecurity, and greed; all of the warriors leave the battlefield victoriously.

A.S. Savvinov and G.G. Sleptsova state that compassion towards people is what shapes the images of the olonkho characters as the defenders of the human race: "Filled with compassion and love to the ones living close to them, bogatyrs will do anything they can to save them. They see their existence and life purpose in this. Each time a character successfully overcomes obstacles, going through the most difficult challenges for the sake of the people, he/she frees oneself from the sins and weaknesses, fights over his inner abasyy, gains vital strength, and opens up a road of spiritual harmony for oneself. The path to reaching a true human happiness and prosperity is to understand and accept one's human nature as it is and to live in compliance with the eternal laws of nature" (Savvinov & Sleptsova, 2017, p.135).

The entirety of the "I am an Aiygy person, the creator of life" concept sphere is achieved through the notion of each human life value in the context of everlasting spiritual, moral and philosophical values, very similar in many national cultures:

- the value of mother- and fatherhood are regarded in all the olonkho systematically. Birth, upbringing, the courageous feats of the bogatyr – all this is done with the parents' blessing. Only the parental guidance and their advice help the bogatyrs reach their goal;
- the value of hard work, compassion and mercy, mutual supportiveness and other epic character values form the nucleus of the olonkho concept sphere and are represented in the character traits description, which represents an inner world of a humanistic and sensible human being;
- The value of goodness and beauty, and the creation of life in olonkho are depicted through the struggle of the good against evil, where the good, being a life-creating force, always wins. Beauty in olonkho is pictured through the nature descriptions of the Middle and Upper Worlds, and the physical and inner beauty of the bogatyr and the aiygy young woman. Valuable concepts of the goodness and beauty in olonkho are closely bonded, which serves as proof of their supreme esthetic criteria of the people's worldview.

Thus, the olonkho concept sphere contains the mental memory and heart of the people, the wisdom of life, pedagogical beliefs, which can arouse the love for life in the hearts of the people. From one heart to another is essence of olonkho pedagogics. Only through the heart the person can have an unbreakable belief in the creating force of goodness and the humanism.

All the people can come closer to the Aiygy gods but when and how? If they learnt to love all that is living and non-living, just like god does. Only love can turn a human being into a god. Only love gives the human beings the pure and strong mind and a kind soul. Only love makes the human beings truly independent creators, the shapers of one's soul, which means that they are the masters of their own life and the constructors of one's happiness.

We Have Reached the Following Research Results:

- a system of concepts built on the principle of concentration was created; it forms the inner spiritual content of the heroic epic: "I am a part of the Universe", "I am a child of nature", "I am an Aiygy person, the creator of life";
- a justification of the rationale for learning olonkho on the basis of the spiritual and importance approach, which brings forth the system of concepts as a means of creating the inner world of a growing person;
- a selection of the methods and approaches to the school student acquisition of the value-and-meaningful content of the heroic epic concepts, which unleash the spiritual strength of the students

through a creative process of listening and reading, and training in language analysis classes as well as completing a system of assignments on the actualization of the reflexive thinking process, etc.

Conclusion

“First came the word”, the word of creation, life, which reflects the human spirit. For the Sakha people, the heroic epic olonkho is just as valuable as the word itself; olonkho shapes the people’s spiritual and moral life setting. In a special fictional form, the olonkho reflects the esthetic human attitude towards life; it also reflects the inner philosophical beliefs of the Sakha people about the meaning of life and the eternal laws of the universe the essence of which lies in the human and nature coexistence.

The spiritual nature of olonkho manifests itself in the person’s harmony with oneself, the nature and the society. Taking this into account, olonkho can be regarded as a memento of the spiritual bond with the ancestors throughout the centuries, which passes on the everlasting humanistic idea, high moral values, which are important for all people regardless their nationality and religious beliefs.

The spiritual olonkho concept sphere lies in and is described through the harmony of the human mind and spirit with the nature and society (with the Aiygy tribe). It is the spiritual component that unifies olonkho with the epic art pieces of other nations, which also reflect the longstanding humanistic ideas, high moral values, important for all the people regardless the religious views and nationality.

Due to such an understanding of the topic, we consider olonkho to be the school of upbringing a sensible person and culturally educated person.

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