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## ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY OF SAKHA PEOPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

This article studies the ecological spirituality of the Sakha people in the context of an indigenous approach. The indigenous methodology study is still at the stage of research and development of the rationale behind it and is not completely recognized by the domestic academic community. The new indigenous methodology development becomes actual since the previous studies had a political background associated with the colonization of the indigenous people and their territories. The growing need for decolonization requires the development of a critically re-considered methodology and new ethno cultural approaches revised from the ethical perspective to study the indigenous peoples. The comparison also consider the experience of the historical development of the Russian peoples and ethnic groups, during the colonial of the pre-revolutionary time, and the process of their unification into a single federal state and a colonial period in the pre-revolutionary time. The research method includes a comparative analysis of the current status of Russian and foreign studies of the indigenous methodology problems. The ecological spirituality of the Sakha people is based on the potential of the primordially indigenous methodology considered through the trinity of the ecology of the inner world as well as the spiritual and cosmic essence of its nature: the ecology of nature, man and soul. Scientific studies describe the concepts of research categories in a structural order, ranging from ethno-pedagogy to ecological spirituality of the Sakha people. An indigenous approach (the inside approach) is based on the original knowledge of indigenous researchers, with consideration through the prism of the natural ethno-cultural identity of peoples in the process of active national and spiritual revival of the Sakha culture, inspired by the ecological spirituality of the Yakut heroic epos Olonkho and the Teachings of Aiyv ethno cultural education, the creation of a space for scientific interpretation and the demand for the origination of ecological spirituality in the modern technocratic world.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical and foreign backgrounds of the indigenous methodology problem require close consideration. Analysis of the studies by such authors as [1], [2], [3, 4] has allowed us to learn the current status of the problem associated with selecting the methodology for indigenous research in the global scientific community, and consider the problems and concerns of the authors working in this sphere. Actualizing indigenous research studies and the need for their introduction into the academic traditions of Western culture has been considered since the 1990s. Over the past 20 years, a number of interesting and informative scientific works have been prepared by representatives of indigenous science in different continents [2]. The concept of indigenous methodology is new to the Russian scientific community since the domestic tradition has developed as a somewhat different historical and political approach to considering this issue. The purpose of the article is to analyze the ecological spirituality of the Sakha people in the context of an indigenous approach while considering a comparative analysis of new Russian and foreign exploratory works within the indigenous methodology. It should be noted that the methodology of indigenous research is still at the stage of research and development of its rationale and is not fully recognized by the academic community, although it has taken its place in the international scientific community. Is it possible to standardize the indigenous methodology as a single methodological basis so that both indigenous (as bearers of one or another studied culture) and nonindigenous researchers could understand each other? Are the analytical approaches and applied methods of both quantitative and qualitative research, which are now used in the global academic scientific practice, suitable for the interpretation of indigenous research studies? As Strauss and [5] write, indigenous studies are mostly of a qualitative research type. They identify the theoretical backgrounds and relationships between the subjects of research, since they do not involve statistical mathematical methods specific for quantitative research. According to [2], phenomenology and narrative research usually correlate with the methodology of indigenous research, since the analysis of stories, tales, narratives of the culture-bearers is the basis for the search for truth and the thesis of the study. However, this methodology is still being questioned from the perspective of the official scientific paradigm.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last century, the principle of ethnographic studies was foregrounded in a specific subject studied by a sideline researcher; hence, the bearers of indigenous cultures became the subject of the study. As Kovach notes, American researchers used the term “exotic” to describe the culture-bearers, meaning researchers of the time considered their findings and observations from a Western European culture perspective. Thus, the conclusions of their studies matched their vision and understanding. In this regard, the research of Linda Tuhivay Smith, one of the first authors in the field of indigenous science, is of great importance. Linda Tuhivay Smith, a researcher and representative of Maori, the author of *Decolonization of Scientific Methodologies* [1], highlighted the relevance of developing new indigenous methodology. According to [1], to understand indigenous-related issues, political motives for the colonization of the indigenous people and their territories, and the growing need for decolonization processes, requires the development of a new, critically re-considered methodology and new ethno-cultural approaches revised from ethics perspectives. [1] Appealed to the indigenous researchers, saying these approaches can help identify specific, actual, relevant, and important issues

for the indigenous people in terms of their self-conception and understanding of their place in the world. Such approaches can also help research move beyond the frameworks of epistemology that is widely accepted in the Western culture. In one way or another, this serves the interests of European scientific thinking and differs from the traditional indigenous paradigm and world perception. [6] , [7] , [8] , and [9] have similar opinions, who state that as a rule, the non-indigenous researchers, rather than subjects of their research, took advantages of bonuses and benefits obtained as the result of the researches. In this regard, it should be noted that the historical development of the Russian peoples and ethnic groups, and the process of their unification into a single federal state had a colonial period in the pre-revolutionary time. Therefore, for example, the conquest of the Siberian territories and the policy of subsequent colonization of the peoples of Siberia—specific to the pre-revolutionary period—also did not contribute to the development of the education system, science, and culture. Scientific studies of that period were also conducted by non-indigenous scientists and political exiles from central Russia. At that, the evaluation of the phenomena of ethnic culture, language, and customs of the peoples living in the North and Siberia were described by researchers in different ways, according to their subjective perception, the nature of phenomena and facts, as well as culture-specific elements misstated in their studies. A parochial education has been widespread in the North-East of Siberia with the aim of converting the indigenous population to Christianity during the pre-revolutionary period. Although the parochial schools had curricula for “aboriginals” and “indigenous” people and included such subjects such as reading and writing in a natural dialect, they had, in fact, not been studied. Thus, during this period, the educational policy was not implemented in the interests of the indigenous population. Evidently, the political situation that arose in Russia in the early 20th century contributed to the Social Democratic Party that came into power in 1917, and declared the possibility of national self-determination and self-consciousness, the development of national and ethnic science, culture, education, and production as its main principles. In the 1920s, the processes of “indigenization”, based on the native language and culture, have been widely implemented in education of the indigenous population and training of indigenous personnel in all spheres. It was during this period when the first indigenous educated intelligentsia, from among the representatives of the peoples of the North, appeared. They proactively initiated the introduction of indigenous science and cultural movement in all spheres of the national economy. With regards to the importance of political and social reforms of the early twentieth century, as representatives of indigenous science, we can conclude that since then, the issues associated with studying indigenous language, culture, science, and public policy in the region have become the subject of studies conducted mainly by the representatives of the indigenous population. Undoubtedly, in the 1930s, the leaders of the national movement of the indigenous population in Yakutia suffered mass repression and persecution. During the twentieth century, there was a certain lull in persecution, and the policy of internationalism was propagated to enhance the role of the Russian language as the national language of interethnic communication. Thereafter, only in the 1990s, when the Russian Federation set up and the Republic achieved sovereignty, did the issues of reviving spiritual culture, language, literature, science, and art of the indigenous population become important again, and the study of indigenous culture was then recognized at the state and official level. It should be noted, that the international policy established in the Soviet state contributed to the development of the indigenous approach within the framework of the scientific and pedagogical direction, which has been widely

recognized in the country as “Ethno-pedagogy” since the 1960s of the 20th century. The most famous founders of the scholarly traditions of ethno-pedagogy includes Volkov, who is an outstanding researcher, ethnographer, teacher, and methodologist, and his followers [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18]. Nowadays, every nation or ethnic group in Russia has its own scientists who were students of Volkov, and who are the indigenous researchers engaged in the study and promotion of researches in the field of training and education of the younger generation to aid in preserving and developing their native culture and language. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the past century, only representatives of indigenous cultures and scientists from among the bearers of a specific culture were engaged in studying the indigenous-related issues in Russia. In this regard, indigenous people, as a subject of the research, have been studied from the perspective of classical academic science only in the pre-revolutionary period. This was because the national policy of the Soviet state contradicted the condescending attitude toward indigenous research, which allowed them to obtain a significant amount of qualitative results of ethno-pedagogical research. Representatives of indigenous science insist on the fact that there is a difference between Western and indigenous way of thinking, which provokes philosophical, ideological and methodological conflicts among the followers of different schools. Here we agree with M. Kovach, who writes that indigenous studies consist of two aspects that can cause difficulties in perception or understanding the research materials and their interpretation by non-indigenous researchers. First, it is the native language of an indigenous researcher which has mobility and flexibility in application, semantic connotation, intonations and subtleties associated with the indigenous person’s understanding of the world; and non-native speakers experience difficulties in grasping and understanding it. And second, it is the indigenous knowledge itself. Such knowledge is descriptive, nature-like, animistic and sometimes it acquires a metaphysical nature. In this respect, the unique aspects of our cultures are rooted in the fact that the mentality, lifestyle, thinking and worldview inherited by the generations are determined by the place of residence. For example, the population living in the northern circumpolar territories, regardless of the country or region, has similar philosophical basis of the worldview, mentality, beliefs and traditions. All these aspects directly underlie the identity and self-esteem. In our opinion, it is legitimate to say that remarkable theorists played an important role in the formation of space for the decolonization of thinking and knowledge of indigenous peoples in the Western academic community, and the contribution the theorists made should be rewarded. On the other hand, indigenous researchers do not argue that the Western theory is useless, that this knowledge belongs only to the representative of a different culture and that we should not use it. Indigenous researchers intend to use all the best theoretical and methodological tools and want to develop new approaches, when necessary.

### 3. THEORETICAL BASIS

The scientific study describes the concepts of research categories in a structural order, ranging from the Ethno-pedagogy and to the ecological spirituality. Ethno-pedagogy is the science which considers the national education in a multinational country, the upbringing of a person of a nation and the formation of an ethno-cultural personality. Ethno-pedagogy excludes the education of people of unknown parentage. Ethno-pedagogy can function only under conditions of constructive interethnic dialogues, which also consider the peculiarities of interfaith and even inter professional dialogues,

while excluding any kind of spiritual, moral, intellectual and other possible conflicts. Ethno-pedagogy can only act as the pedagogy of freedom and love. The question is: what is upbringing? And Ethno-pedagogy responds: “Example and love”, where conscience, morality and spirituality rule [10, 11, 19, 20, 21]. The classic appreciation actualize the idea of national education put forth by K.D. Ushinsky: “Every nation has its own specific educational system” [22]. The social environment cultivates the “second nature” of a person - the ethnic culture, but the intellectualization of a culture can be described by a meaningful word “cultivization”. Cultivization is a philosophical category proposed in 1912 by A.E. Kulakovsky, the brilliant thinker and prophet of the Sakha (Letter to the Yakut Intelligentsia). Cultivization, as a national idea, played its historical role in the revival of the ethnic culture of the Sakha people; it also influenced the breakthrough in all areas of social and economic development of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). That was such a great progress that practice was ahead of theory. Understanding of the scientific meaning of the philosophy of the cultivization appeared later. Of course, the process of cultivization is still ongoing and is enriched by the experience of international cooperation [23, 24, 25, 26]. It refers to a wide range of social and historical changes and environmental transformations of the “Nature-Man-Society” connections system: the transition from an agricultural economy to industrial production, a breakthrough of industrial civilization towards the information technologies, and then the beginning of digital era (global digitization of life). However, the progress also has a backside - the so-called crisis of a technocratic civilization. Mankind enthusiastically accepts the positive aspects of scientific and technological progress, but we are not fully aware of the potential disadvantages of the digital era. In this regard, it is appropriate to quote the words of I.E. Maximov: “All the evils of a technocratic civilization - a consumer society, health problems and moral degradation of a person are in one or another way associated with the weakening, deformation and direct destruction of the primordial umbilical connection of Man and Mother Nature and the violation of natural chastity of brain sobriety” [27]. Escaping from this crisis, we see the potential for solving the problem in the age-old indigenous methodology of the Sakha people through the trinity of the ecology of the inner world, the spiritual and cosmic essence of its nature: the ecology of nature, man and soul. Proceeding from the above and following the hierarchical basis, we can put forth an idea of ecological spirituality. Ecological spirituality is the preservation, restoration and strengthening of the primordial, umbilical and ethnic mental connection between Man and Nature and the upbringing of the younger generation on the ideal of the Supreme Intelligence - the Noosphere. The initial point of our theoretical study of ecological spirituality on the example of the people of Sakha is the Yakut heroic epos Olonkho. Due to UNESCO has proclaimed it as “a masterpiece of oral non-material heritage of humanity” [28, 29, 23, 27] this study has been initiated.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The method used in this research implies a comparative analysis of the current status of Russian and foreign studies within the problems of indigenous methodology. Indigenous researchers proceed from the idea that their research should be aimed at finding solutions to problems within the framework of tribal indigenous local interpretation (Betty Bastien). In particular, in this study, we stick to this position in order to analyse the ecological spirituality on the example of the indigenous



approach of indigenous researchers and scientists from among the Sakha people. The data collection is based on the historically established cultural tradition of the native people, and we adapt it for the application of modern parameters in the study. In this regard, the research methodology is the interpretation of the variative understanding of the philosophy of the Sakha people and their worldview on the basis of an indigenous methodology from the perspective of the meaning of life and the paradigm of the ecological and centrist understanding of the world. In particular, life is a vector of human ascension from the past to the future, from the earthly corporeal-material being to the Universal Spirit: the laying of the natural ethnic mental potential for development; intellectual and professional ascent; social and patriotic activity.

## 5. RESULT

Indigenous approach, in other words “the inside” approach, in the context of realization of ecological spirituality of the Sakha people is based on the original knowledge of indigenous researchers through the prism of the natural ethno-cultural identity of peoples. The indigenous researchers say that the indigenous approach in the research is characterized by the analysis of stories, tales, narrations of culture bearers, which serves as the basis of the search for truth. In this regard, the researchers of the Sakha people claim that the unique aspects of indigenous cultures are rooted in the fact that the mentality, way of life, thinking and attitude to the world inherited by generations is determined by the place of residence. For example, the population living in the northern circumpolar territories, regardless of the country or region, has similar philosophical basis of the worldview, mentality, beliefs and traditions. In particular, the indigenous people of Alaska, Canada, American Indians and others are united by the pagan basis of beliefs, idolization of the forces of Nature and heaven. It is time to re-orient the educational system towards the indigenous, nature-aligned and anthropological approach. Indigenous approach - is an appeal to the ethnocultural origins of the nation. In particular, ethnocultural education based on Olonkho pedagogy becomes consonant with the global idea, which is aimed not only at our own existence and development, but also extends the peaceful coexistence of the entire human race. From the perspective of upbringing the younger generation, the content and forms of the pedagogy system of Olonkho lies in the language, folklore, history of the Sakha people; the values of their life and work, the traditional original spiritual and material culture, national education, the Teachings of Aiygy, the philosophy of the Sakha people - all together they represent a full picture of the World and the essence of the ecological spirituality of the Sakha people [26, 29, 23, 28].

## 6. DISCUSSION

Our analysis of the studies of indigenous peoples is based on the key provisions of the monographic study written [2]. She considers the results of studying the indigenous peoples of North America and pays special attention on concepts that accompany research solutions and knowledge collection methods, samplings and protocols that acquire a special feature within the framework of the indigenous methodology. In connection with the practical aspects of the study of historical events conducted by indigenous peoples, the discussion proceeds to the consideration of the challenges associated with the data analyses and understanding the truth within the tribal interpretations. Despite the fact that a number of qualities within the study of indigenous peoples is an integral part of

knowledge production, its application could cause difficulties in the interpretation of research methods. For indigenous researchers, research methods are closely related to the traditions and life of indigenous peoples. In the past decade, research protocols for indigenous peoples have been developed to protect them from ethical violations. Partially this task is of educational nature, while indigenous peoples state why research activities could have ethical implications for tribal culture. The main function of the protocols is in decolonization of research methods, i.e. re-consideration of any disrespectful aspects of research associated with the history of indigenous peoples. Due to such cases, indigenous research protocols have been developed based on community dialogue and case studies in ethically responsible research. According to, the truth (reality) is connected to the integrity of a person sharing his knowledge. Stephenson makes the following proposal to indigenous historians: "The task of historians is to restore the past and present it to the public in a form acceptable for the people whose experience and life it represents". Thus, given the misinterpretation of indigenous culture in the context of research, the solution of an ethical problem should be considered vital. Many criticisms are found during the analysis of the political nature of knowledge formation in marginalized communities. Thus, in terms of indigenous research, [1] applies a special analysis of decolonization, which shows the extent to which the indigenous knowledge has been marginalized in Western research processes [2]. In particular, this caused difficulties in the context of studying Canadian Aboriginal people, as most of non-indigenous people forgot the colonial history of this country. At the international level, this could be observed through the globalization and the spread of consumer culture which feed the economic system to the detriment of ecology, as aimed to support the human species. Manu Aluli Meyer, an indigenous researcher, describes his connection with epistemology as follows: "The deeper I immerse in tribal knowledge systems, the more I resist Western methods of knowledge, although I realize that this contradicts the established principles." Further, according to Meyer, epistemological presence in life and research exists everywhere, because epistemology reflects the relations of the quality of indigenous knowledge systems. It is this foundation that distinguishes indigenous research from Western methodologies. Thus, indigenous studies drew attention to the existence of a certain prevalence of western views and principles in science, as a result of which alternative research methods became marginalized and the issue of indigenous peoples was excluded from the methodological options. According to, the Western universities have established standards for scientific knowledge. In order to establish a framework for studying the indigenous peoples, it is necessary to critically assess the established standards and consider methodologies from the perspective of the indigenous people. The point is that the decolonizing theory and methods working in cooperation with the epistemology of the tribes change traditional, social and research relationships. The function of the decolonial goal implicates the provision of indigenous researchers with a context-analytical tool for identifying the visible contradictions and developing indigenous approaches. However, the struggle to preserve the indigenous cultural epistemological position in such powerful institutions as universities can once be absorbed by the Western thought. At the same time, all indigenous scientists agree to log what they have heard in order to avoid distortion of information. But at the same time, Stevenson says that oral histories of indigenous peoples do not share generally accepted categorical boundaries: "the folklore material is holistic — it includes religious teachings, metaphysical connections, cultural insight, history, language structures, literary and aesthetic form, and the "truth" of indigenous peoples. Gerald

Vizenor notes that holistic knowledge is lost when stories are not transmitted orally: “So much is lost in translation — the general context of performance, gestures, intonation — even the best translations are abbreviations of the original”. On the basis of a comparative analysis and as it is noted above, aspects of our cultures (indigenous peoples of foreign countries and the Sakha people) are rooted in the fact that the mentality inherited by generations, lifestyle, thinking, and attitude to the world are determined by their place of residence. For example, the indigenous people of Alaska, Canada, American Indians and the people of Sakha are united by the pagan basis of beliefs, idolization of the forces of Nature and heaven. In this regard, A.E. Kulakovskiy wrote that in the past the Yakuts had “a religion of a prominent development, which was forgotten due to the lack of writing and the process of conversion to Christianity. The utilitarian and materialistic attitude were specific for the Yakut religion; the Yakut belief was far from idolatry and shamanism, as it had passed this stage in several steps [30, 29]. On this stage, we proceed from the fact that the mission of the Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University involves the preservation and development of the cultures of the peoples living in the North-East of Russia and the circumpolar regions of the Arctic, which is one of the most important and priority areas for the strategic development of our federal university. So, among the newly created structural divisions of the university, there is an institute that implements programs for further in-depth study of the heroic epic literature of the Sakha - Olonkho, the world-class masterpiece, the philosophy of life and traditional popular method of younger generation upbringing [28, 23, 16, 31].

## 7. CONCLUSION

The presented analysis of foreign studies and research conducted by scientists from among the Sakha people shows that the problem of studying the own indigenous culture, language, science and art has been analyzed by many authors on different continents in the framework of different social and political systems and situations. But we share the opinion, that in the future a tendency of special demand for the development of a new indigenous methodology will be observed, since the academic science has not officially adopted the methodological approaches developed by the representatives of the indigenous science. It should be noted, that the indigenous approach to the analysis of events and phenomena is worlds apart from the well-established traditional scientific research methodology, including methods for preparing the study, collecting data, processing information, etc. As it has been previously defined, the indigenous knowledge itself is descriptive, nature-like, animistic and sometimes acquires a metaphysical character. We agree that the methodology of the indigenous research includes ethical goals that suggest that the methodology should be consistent with the indigenous values. Any research should provide benefits and positive results for the indigenous population, and the researchers should act as an ally and be guided by "do no harm" principle. J. Porsanger defines the indigenous research as ethically correct study that meets the worldview of indigenous peoples, and the indigenous method should make steps towards accepting and popularizing knowledge on the indigenous population. These principles of the developed methodology of indigenous research should also find their place in the scientific discussion among the Russian research community, and become the part of a common understanding of the strategy for the development of research on indigenous issues. Thus, we consider the concept of ecological spirituality as a new direction of reviving the national idea of indigenous people being in the existing



living conditions, as well as spiritual and moral education of their younger generation, since it is the indigenous approach that reflects the closeness and original nature of certain universal human values, concepts and ideals adopted by the peoples and ethnic groups at the genetic level. That is why we consider this concept in the potential of the primordially indigenous methodology of the Sakha people through the trinity of the ecology of the inner world, the spiritual and cosmic essence of its nature: the ecology of nature, man, soul. Indigenous approach, in other words "the inside" approach, in the context of ecological spirituality of Sakha people is based on the original knowledge of indigenous researchers considered through the prism of the natural ethno-cultural identity of peoples in the process of active national and spiritual revival of the Sakha culture inspired by the ecological spirituality of Yakut heroic epos *Olonkho* and Teachings of *Aiyy* as a centuries-old indigenous methodological basis for the development of ethnic mentality, the originality of traditional life in the North, the development of ethnocultural education, the creation of a space for scientific interpretation and the demand for the origination of ecological spirituality in the modern technocratic world.

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No data is used or generated from this study.

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