

# SPIRITUAL CULTURE OF THE SAKHA PEOPLE HISTORY AND MODERNITY

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The three-hundred-year-old spiritual culture of the Sakha people underwent major changes at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of Sakha becoming a member of the Russian state. The process of Christianization of the Sakha people, which began in the seventeenth century, facilitated integration of “the Yakut society into the widest spiritual and cultural space,<sup>1</sup>” made education accessible to them, and familiarized them to Russian and via it to European and world cultures. It led to the appearance of Yakut writing and belles-lettres, the national press, and formation of the spiritual and intellectual elite. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the foundation was laid for the formation of the modern culture of the Sakhas on the basis of interaction of traditional and Russian cultures.

But a new type of culture was formed among a small group of people, which consisted of mainly representatives of the upper crust of the Yakut society. This group also included people who had achieved success in education and state service on their own abilities. The main Sakha population lived in a traditional socio-cultural environment, a special feature of which was syncretism. The outlook of the Sakhas to the world, as well as traditional, religious and mythological ideas and the system of rational knowledge of the people, remained a syncretic one. The Sakhas mainly followed the rituals of the Orthodox, but also retained their own traditional rituals and customs. Arts such as oral poetry, music, song, dance, theatre, and fine art, which joined various kinds and genres, were syncretic.

After a new political regime established in October 1917, all nations had equal rights. There were programs conducted for the development of education, literature, and art. But under the Soviet power, policies relating to national and cultural building in different regions of the country were implemented inconsistently. The main doctrine of the ruling party was to build a new public social civilization and to develop it into a communist one worldwide. Party leaders tried to realize this aim by changes of a man, all spiritual life of a new society. All innovations in cultural building were determined mainly by ideological considerations, and the Bolsheviks realized the role of Soviet cultural and educational institutes in introducing communist ideology, which could give a new perspective to people. Nevertheless, the liberal linguistic and cultural policy existing in the 1920s promoted the rapid development of Yakut writing and literature and the appearance of

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<sup>1</sup> Republic Sakha (Yakutia): Way to sovereignty. Yakutsk, 2000, p. 39.

professional art. This period of the Soviet national republics existed under the banner of routinization, which meant "training" of local personnel, drawing indigenous people into socialist building. National republics had comparatively more rights in internal affairs, which were also used in the field of culture.

The routinization policy promoted the eradication of illiteracy among adults, further education of the Sakhas in secondary specialized and higher schools and, consequently, training of national personnel. Yakutia in 1934 had 17 secondary specialized educational establishments for fields such as pedagogy, building, mining, agriculture, and medicine. In the same year, the first higher school, the Yakutsk Pedagogical Institute, was established. The number of Yakut young men who trained in central secondary and higher schools increased steadily.<sup>2</sup>

According to the census in 1939, 54% of the Sakha population aged nine and older was literate, of which 59.6% were men and 47.6% women. Of the 8206 people who had a secondary education (33.9 per 1000 men), 6159 were men and 2047 women; of the 314 people who had a higher education (1.3 per 1000), 274 were men and 40 women. In 1939, 369 Sakhas were at higher, secondary specialized schools and 2213 at factory-plant schools.<sup>3</sup>

Simultaneously, national literature and professional art also developed. Yakut literature, especially poetry and dramatic art, achieved great success. The art of story writing was mastered, and the first novellas appeared. The development of literature in turn facilitated the formation of standards of the language of literature. The language of modern Yakut literature was based on the language of Yakut folklore. Famous scientist and linguist P.A. Slepsov writes: "Because the language of Yakut folklore was similar to the language of literature by its basic functional indications, it was the source for the modern language of literature in its formative period. The direct use of folklore language in the belles-lettres carried on till the end of the 1930s." Yakut literature was enriched by the use of language of folklore in various kinds and genres of art.<sup>4</sup>

Yakut folklore was the basis of formation of the entire professional art of the Sakhas: theatre, music, fine art, and other national arts. As mentioned previously, traditional art of the Sakhas was syncretic. Olonkho, the heroic epics of the Yakuts, incorporated both the creativity of a musical work and the technicalities of a singer and dramatist. It played a special role in it. In V.T. Petrov's opinion, "The experience of performing of heroic epos-olonkho played an important role in mastery of skill by Yakut actors. Amateur actors during performance proceeded from Olonkho content, the revealing of which requires transformation quite often."<sup>5</sup> Shamanism consisted of various kinds and genres of art.

<sup>2</sup> Argunov, I.A. *Socialisticheskaya sud'ba yakutskogo naroda* [ Socialist fate of the Yakut people ] Yakutsk, 1985, pp. 120-121.

<sup>3</sup> Union Census of the Population: Main results. St. -Petersburg, Russia, 1999, pp. 103, 121, 152.

<sup>4</sup> Slepsov, P.A. *Yakutskiy literaturnyi yazyk: formirovanie i razvitie obschenatsionalnykh norm* [ Yakut literature language: Formation and development of national standards ] Novosibirsk, 1990, pp.230-241.

<sup>5</sup> Petrov, V.T. *Folklornye traditsii v yakutskoi sovetskoj literature* [ Folklore traditions in Yakut soviet literature ] - M.,1978, p. 96.

Literature reveals that a shaman's performance was considered as original theater performed by one actor, wherein mythology, ritual, mystery, and dance fused in one person and in one action, which during later periods split into independent kinds of art. A shaman in his ritual blended the arts of being a producer, poet-improvisator, singer, musician, illusionist, imitator, and dancer.<sup>6</sup>

The first professional theater of the Sakhas was the Yakutsk drama theater, established in October 1925. The best in amateur acting were the first theater actors, who subsequently became famous actors and writers, for example, V.V. Mestnikov, T.P. Mestnikov, M.E. Fedorova, and S.A. Savvin. A.I. Sofronov was one of the initiators of Yakut drama and founder of the national theater, being appointed its head in December 1926. Sofronov's plays were always very popular. Plays by P. Ojunskiy, A. Kyunde, N. Neustroyev, and S. Omollon were also staged. New life, its contradictions, and new images of the transition period were reflected in these plays.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, building of cultural and educational organizations, which served as ideological institutions, began. The activity of cultural organizations further promoted the development of folk art and the spread of amateur art. In 1938, for example, in 14 districts of the republic there were 302 clubs of various types of amateur art, including 82 for theatre, 63 for music, 47 for dance, and 62 for singing.<sup>8</sup> The initiators and active organizers of such clubs were famous Olonkho folk singers and storytellers such as S.A. Zverev, S.V. Gerasimov, N.I. Stepanov, I.M. Davydov, and N.S. Alexandrov. Drama staging of Olonkho was very popular in village clubs and in Ysyakh festivals of collective farms. From 1937, amateur talent was reviewed each year by the republic.<sup>9</sup>

The formation of the art of professional music is closely associated with the creative work of Olonkho singers and amateur melody makers. A.V. Skryabin, F.G. Kornilov, and M.N. Zhirkov were of the founding fathers of the art of professional music. A.V. Skryabin started a choir, a brass band, and a company of khomus (Jews-harp) players in the Yakut theater, and collected and recorded Yakut folk songs. In 1927 in Moscow, he published his collection of Yakut songs and melodies. F.G. Kornilov in his 25-year creative career composed about 240 Yakut melodies. In 1936, F.G. Kornilov published a collection of 88 Yakut songs, 49 of which he composed himself. In the 1920s, he took an active part in organizing cultural and educational events and headed the choir of the Sakha Omuk association. In 1936, the national choir was created by M.N. Zhirkov, who was the first professional Yakut composer having a higher education. Early professional singers such as E.A. Zakharova, T.P. Mestnikova, A.I. Egorova, and A.P. Lytkina were trained in this

<sup>6</sup> Vasilieva, N.D. Yakutskoe shamanstvo. 1920-1930-e gody [ Yakut shamanism. 1920-1930 ] Yakutsk, 2000, pp. 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Formirovanie sotsialisticheskoi, pp. 102-111; Maximov, D.K. Ocherk istorii Yakutskogo dramaticheskogo teatra [ Essay of the Yakut drama theatre history ] Yakutsk, 1985, pp. 5-57.

<sup>8</sup> Kul'turnaya revolyutsiya v Yakutii [ Cultural revolution in Yakutia ] Yakutsk, 1968, p. 546.

<sup>9</sup> Illarionov, V.V. Iskusstvo yakutskikh olonkhosutov [ Art of Yakut olonkho singers ] Yakutsk, 1982, pp. 110-115; Lukina, A.G. Traditsionnaya tantsevalnaya kul'tura yakutov [ Traditional dance culture of Yakuts ] Novosibirsk, 1998, pp. 126.

choir.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1940s, a base for the national choir, a group comprising vocal, ballet, and orchestra departments was created. At the end of the same year, a musical drama on heroic epos-olonkho, the "Nyurgun Bootur the Rapid," was staged in the Yakut theater (V. Mestnikov was the producer and G. Turalysov the artist). Thus, the theater reflected creative maturity and a traditional base. In further development of music of the Sakhas, Yakut folklore was the base for almost all significant musical works, for example, operas such as "Nyurgun Bootur" and "Sygyi Kyrnastyr" by M. Zhirkov and G. Litinsky, "Lookkut and Nyurguhun" by G. Grigoryan, "Songs of Manchary" by G. Komrakov and E. Alexeev, "Red Shaman" by G. Litinsky, and ballets such as "Field Flower" by M. Zhirkov and G. Litinsky and "Kuyn-Kuo" by V. Kats.<sup>11</sup>

The foundation of Yakut professional fine art was laid by the cultural, educational, and scientific associations "Manchary," "Sakha Omuk," and "Sakha Keskile," established in 1920. These organizations began by doing elaborations of ethnographical works that were devoted to subjects such as peculiarities of the way of life in the nation and collection and fixation of monuments of historical significance and folk ornaments. The outlook of fine art was modern and the focus was on socially important events, such as "Yakutsk at the End of the Seventeenth Century," "Shaman," and "School Building in Ytyk-Kel" by I.V. Popov; "In the Poor Man's Yurta" and "In the Hayfield of Bai" by M.M. Nosov; and "Collective Farm Ysyakh Festival" by P.P. Romanov. The fine arts of easel and theatre painting and book drawing were developed in these years. Traditional applied art was still popular among the Sakhas, but underwent changes. But at that time folk art could not be amalgamated into the process of professional art. The art critic I. G. Potapov points out that in the 1920s and 1930s, the first steps were taken toward the rapprochement of professional and traditional folk art, that is, "folk art influenced in some way the artists' perception of nature, environment, and also of the language of their representational."<sup>12</sup>

During the first decade of the Soviet power, spiritual culture of the Sakhas underwent rapid changes. A certain progress was achieved in development and formation of the modern forms of spiritual culture of the Sakhas. During its formation, especially during later development, the Sakha culture suffered vital losses. Increasing ideological pressure heavily influenced culture, leaving some aspects of traditional culture out of its unified influence. One of the main features of these decades was the hypertrophy of the critical relations to spiritual culture of the past. All material-spiritual ideas on traditional religious belief were persecuted violently, because the Bolsheviks believed that one of the main barriers to establishing a monopoly of communist ideology in spiritual life was religion.

In these years, the Sakhas were forced to oust shamanism. Shamans such as the

<sup>10</sup> Formirovanie sotsialisticheskoi, pp. 102-111; Maximov, op. cit., pp. 20-54.

<sup>11</sup> Maximov, op. cit., pp. 8, 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> Formirovanie sotsialisticheskoi, pp. 111-121; Ivanov, V.Kh. Razvitie zhanrov v yakutskoi zhivopisi [ Genres development in Yakut painting ] Yakutsk, 1984, p. 72.

ministers of religious cult were considered alien elements, and fighting shamanism was considered a part of the struggle for socialism. Dire measures were taken against shamans: deprivation of civil rights and property rights, criminal persecution, and public court. By the end of the 1920s and the beginning of 1930s, the fight against shamanism caught momentum, and at the end of the 1930s, shamanism was removed in that at least there was no open cult manifestation. But, as known, a shaman's role in the Yakut society was unique in its function and nature of activity. The performing shaman played a positive role as a keeper and translator of traditional religious beliefs of the Sakhas. In this activity, the shamans used as their base the resources of traditional culture that had been accumulated through centuries, including folk medicine, social psychology, and folk art. The eradication of shamanism destroyed the entire system of religious, moral and ethical, medical, and ecological knowledge. A particularly negative effect during the eradication of shamanism was the opposition of the younger generation to the older one, drawing young men into mass anti-shamanist activities. This was one of the reasons for disintegration of the entire spiritual and cultural experience of the Sakhas.

Under the banner of " Struggle with Religion and its Survivals, " a campaign of struggle with traditional rituals and customs was launched. At the same time, a new Soviet culture of rituals and festivals was introduced, in which social and political festivals having their own " divinities, saints and rituals " took a special place. As a result, the traditional ritual culture of the Sakhas underwent a material transformation, losing its base, which embodied in it religion and views of the world. The rituals and festivals that had been preserved lost their long-standing content and sense and retained only some national elements.

Events that were referred to in Soviet historiography as " affirmation of Socialist realism method " took place in literature and art. During the Soviet power, many literary and ideological campaigns were conducted that were nihilistic to folklore and to creative work of the initiators of Yakut literature. If such an attitude to folklore was overcome and its role in the formation of modern culture recognized, then the literary legacy of the pre-revolution writers would not have been considered petty-bourgeois, reactionary, and nationally chauvinistic in the history of national culture.<sup>13</sup> It can be said that totalitarian power, which was firmly established at the end of the 1920s, began to change culture. The repression of prominent representatives of the national intelligentsia and a strict ideological regulation of creative work and its limitation to the frame of social realism paralyzed the activity of the intelligentsia. Spiritual culture became more ideological. As a result, ideologies of a particular bracket of population, especially the young men, changed. Ideas of socialism were absolute truth and young men wished to follow them. But for most people these ideas were not an essence of their life because of a gap between realities of everyday

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<sup>13</sup> *Istoriya yakutskoi literatury* [ History of Yakut literature ] Yakutsk, 1993, pp. 5-12; Alexeev, op. cit., pp. 211-214; Antonov, E.P. *Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skoe obshchestvo " Sakha Omuk " (1920-1928)* [ Cultural and educational association " Sakha Omuk " ] Novosibirsk, 1998, pp. 75-77.

life and mentality of the Sakhas.

From the 1960s, spiritual culture of the Sakhas made a sudden leap. From the 1940s to the end of the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult to preserve the national nucleus of culture. From the end of the 1930s, the process of Russification under the pretext of creating a new ethos - the Soviet people - occurred. It was assumed that communist ideology would make a general intellectual foundation for everybody, and by using Russian as the language for international dealings, a synthesis of cultures would take place - a united "socialist culture" and "socialist nation" would be formed. In the field of education, especially during the stagnation period, there was an intensive introduction of the Russian language in schools and the widespread use of Yakut grades. The language of higher schools was only Russian. In 1988-1989, of 56,000 Sakha schoolchildren, 44,000 (78.6%) from the first to the seventh grade were taught in the native language. More than 5000 (8.9%) attended Yakut classes, where they studied native language and literature as subjects, and over 7000 (12.5%) Sakha children attended Russian language schools. This concerned schoolchildren in towns and some district centers and in workers' settlements, where Russian population dominated. In 1986, for example, only 16% of Sakha schoolchildren in Yakutsk knew their native language. At the same time, during these years, high rates of education were registered among the Sakhas. Census data of 1989 from 1000 persons aged 15 or more revealed that 838 had a secondary, secondary specialized, and higher education, which was higher than the corresponding data for all other nations in the republic.<sup>14</sup>

A unified system of education that lacked an ethnic aspect aided the removal of the rising generation of the Sakhas from national culture. Data from sociological research on 3000 Sakhas conducted in 1992-1993 in central uluses (= districts) of the republic revealed that almost 50% were not well aware of the history of their nation, and 25% did not know their folklore and traditions. Only 16% knew their own history well, and 9.1% knew their folklore and traditions. About 10%-20% realized that they were becoming estranged from their national culture.<sup>15</sup> In September 1999-March 2000, a sociological research was conducted on 300 residents of Tattinsky ulus and the town of Yakutsk, in which opinions were taken on matters regarding national culture. To the question "Do you know Yakut folk customs and rituals well," 40%-56% replied that they had a general idea. Rituals related to hunting (22%), economy (14%), and childbirth (18%) were the more known traditional rituals and customs. Of the polled men, 2%-4% knew all the enumerated rituals, but did not adhere to them; 20%-30% had a poor knowledge about the rituals and customs of the Sakhas; 7% did not know the wedding rituals at all; 17% (mainly women) did not know hunting rituals; 11% did not know funeral rituals; 15% did not know

<sup>14</sup> Argunova, T.V. Funktsionirovanie yazykov v shkolakh RS (Y)/ Istoriko-etnosotsialnye issledovaniya. Regionalnye problemy. [ Languages functioning at schools of the Sakha Republic (Y)/ Historical and ethnic social researches, Regional problems ] Novosibirsk, 1998, pp. 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> Spiridonova, I.E. Etnokul'turnoe vzaimodeistvie i mezhnatsionalnye otnosheniya v Yakutii [ Ethnic cultural interactions and international relations in Yakutia ] Novosibirsk, 1999, pp. 81-82.

economy rituals; and 14% did not know childbirth rituals. About 50% of the polled people, mainly the rural residents and persons older than 50, had general idea of folklore (folk songs, dances, and oral creative work).<sup>16</sup>

Social and political changes in the republic during the last decade of the twentieth century brought about an active interest in the public to the history of its own nation and its culture, traditions, and customs. To help preserve and further develop the spiritual culture of the Sakhas, a program was adopted by the Ministry of Culture of the Sakha Republic in 1991. In this program, four priority trends - Khomus, Ysyakh, Olonkho, and Belief - played a major role. The first stage was to organize and conduct in 1991 an international congress on problems in Jews' harp music in 1991, the "Jews' Harp (Khomus): Traditions and Modernity." In 1991, which was the Year of the Khomus, great emphasis was laid on establishing schools, learning various methodologies of playing the Khomus, and reviving and scientifically studying the traditional technologies involved in the production of this instrument. Attention to the Jews' harp aroused such an interest to the instrumental traditions of the Yakutia nations that a special workshop of national instruments was organized in the village of Berdigestyakh in Gorniy district. The International Center of Jews' harp music and the museum have been functional since 1992 in Yakutsk. The center now has branches in Japan, Austria, USA, Germany, and in countries of the CIS. The activity of the center and its branches has been directed toward constituting scientific and creative plans, coordinating efforts to introduce Jews' harp study as a new subdivision of music.

Another step was adding Ysyakh, the national festival, as an official holiday in the calendar of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). Giving a state status to Ysyakh and organizing it in all areas gave a second birth to this ancient syncretic ritual. Because of the support of republic authorities and the active participation of enthusiasts, the Ysyakh was declared a traditional holiday and included as a part of modern culture. In 1998, the Republic Center of Creative Work organized the program "Yakut National Holiday - Ysyakh," and the locality Us khatyn was chosen as the new venue in Yakutsk for organizing the festival, where, according to legends of the Sakhas, the Ysyakh ritual was performed by the Yakut ancestors for the first time.

The year 1993 was announced as the Olonkho Year. In this year, various programs were organized in Yakutia: a festival of narrative art; a review of Olonkho performances in Tattinsky ulus; premiere of the epic opera "Nurgub Bootur" by M. Zhirkov and G. Litinsky in the Opera and Ballet Theater; days of Yakutia culture and art in Paris, devoted to P.Ojunskiy's 100th anniversary; a show on the Olonkho plot "Shamans Ajgyr and Uolumar," performed by the dance theatre Erel; the international conference on epos, devoted to A.B. Lord, in which leading epos researchers from Russia, countries of the CIS, Europe, and USA participated; and publication of epic stories of the Yakutia people.

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<sup>16</sup> The Sakha Republic (Yakutia): Way to sovereignty. Yakutsk, 2000, pp. 275-276.

A program called Olonkho (1992-2000) was presented by the efforts of scientists and folk storytellers, with the aim of reviving and passing on epic traditions. National theaters, schools, and studios were created in uluses to aid this venture. In early 1999, the Association of Olonkho Lovers was created. Its aim was to unify the efforts of public organizations, experts, and enthusiasts to revive, perpetuate, and propagate Olonkho; familiarize many strata of the population with values of national culture; cooperate with international and regional organizations to study the problems of folklore; publish science, teaching, and literature of methodology; organize festivals, reviews, competitions, scientific and practical conferences, and expeditions.<sup>17</sup>

Religion had a special place in spiritual life of the Sakhas like in other nations of Russia during the last decade of the twentieth century. This reflected the increasing interest of people to traditional religious belief and shamanism. A section of the national intelligentsia created a new Sakha religion "Ajyy yorege," which represent a fusion of Paganism, Christianity, and Buddhism with the folklore and epic traditions of the Yakuts. Today, several organizations propagate the traditional beliefs of the Sakhas: "Kut-Sur" (1993), the republic association "Itegel" (1994), the research organization on problems of national medicine and belief "Urun Aar Tojon" (1996) affiliated to the Association of National Medicine; and the spiritual center "Syrdyk aartyk" (1996). Today, various trends of neo-paganism are appearing, such as the religious and philosophical system "Ajyy yorege," the ethic and philosophic doctrine "Ajyy siere," the ideology of traditional healing or light shamanism "Urun Aar Tojon," and the tengrianity doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

In spring 2000, workers of the Institute of Humanitarian Research of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) Academy of Sciences conducted a sociological opinion poll among the Sakha people under the program "The Sakha People from Century to Century." The research was done in four uluses (Megino-Kangalasskiy, Khangalasskiy, Nurbinskiy, and Verkhoyanskiy) and in Yakutsk. Of the 496 Sakhas who took part in the poll, 225 (45.4%) were men and 271 (54.6%) women. As regards distribution by age group, 86 (17.3%) were 18-24 years old, 125 (25.2%) were 24-34 years old, 158 (31.9%) were 35-49 years old, 60 (12.1%) were 50-59 years old, and 67 (13.5%) were older than 60. Of the polled men, 28.7% had higher and unfinished education, 60.9% had secondary and secondary specialized education, and 8.5% had incomplete secondary education.

According to the poll (Table 1), 37% of the 496 respondents considered themselves to be religious, 16.4% were hesitant, 37% were not religious, and 9.6% found it difficult to answer. Moreover, the number of women who considered themselves as religious greatly exceeded the corresponding number of men (44.2% in women versus 28.1% in men). The percentage of women hesitating to answer also exceeded the number of men

<sup>17</sup> Nikiforova, V. *Vozrozhdenie tradicionnoi kul'tury. Realii i perspektivy* [Revival of traditional culture. Realities and perspectives]. Urgel, 1995, vol. 1, pp. 4-9; vol. 2, pp. 4-7; Republic Sakha, op. cit., pp. 264-266; Culture of the Sakha Republic Yakutia: Ten sovereignty years. Yakutsk, 2000, p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Ethnosocial development of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia): potential, tendencies, perspectives. Novosibirsk, 2000, p. 148.

(19.1% in women versus 13.1% in men). Two main age groups show a higher level of religiosity (Table 2): young people from 18 to 24 years of age (47.0%) and older people (41.6%). The lowest percentage of religious persons was observed among respondents 25-34 years old (30.9%).

According to data of the opinion poll (Table 3), most of the religious persons stated that they had traditional religious beliefs of the Sakhas (72.1%), 21.8% were Orthodox,

**Table 1.** Religiosity of the Sakhas in 2000 by sex (%)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Religious persons trying to adhere to customs and rituals	22.1	16	27.1
Religious persons but not adhering to customs and rituals	14.9	12.1	17.1
Hesitant	16.4	13.1	19.1
Not religious persons	37.0	48.1	27.9
Difficult to decide	9.6	10.7	8.8

**Table 2.** Religiosity of the Sakhas in 2000 by age distribution (%)

	<i>Age (years)</i>				
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-59	Older than 60
Religious persons trying to adhere to customs and rituals	28.9	16.1	23.6	19.2	23.3
Religious persons but not adhering to customs and rituals	18.1	14.8	11.1	17.3	18.3
Hesitant	21.7	18.6	14.6	11.5	13.3
Not religious persons	24.1	37.3	41.0	44.2	38.3
Difficult to decide	7.2	13.6	9.7	7.7	6.7

**Table 3.** Ethnic confessional membership of the Sakhas (%)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Age distribution</i>				
		<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>18-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>	<i>35-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>Older than 60</i>
Orthodox	21.9	22	21.6	20	20.5	24.3	13	27.8
Romanism Catholicism	0.9	-	1.5	2.2	-	-	-	3
Protestantism	0.5	-	0.7	-	-	-	-	3
Buddhism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Muslimism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Judahism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Traditional belief	72.1	72.8	71.6	75.6	70.5	72.9	82.6	60.6
Others	4.7	4.9	4.5	2.2	9.1	2.9	4.3	6.1

0.9% Catholic, and 0.5% Protestant. It is clear that the Sakha people have a tendency to return to traditional religious beliefs. There is a growth of national self-awareness, and the nation aspires to revive traditional cultural values. As for the Orthodox, it is necessary to remember that this religion played an important role in the spiritual life of the Sakhas for several centuries. It should also be noted that the Orthodox were always tolerant to paganism and may be in the future, and that is why the Sakhas accepted this religion as being something normal and natural. No other confession was comparable to the Orthodox and traditional religious beliefs.

During the last few years, the revival of some traditional elements of the ritual culture and customs has been widespread among the Sakhas. For example, in the wedding ritual, such customs and rituals as algys (blessing) for the bride and fiance, ritual kumys drinking, feeding of the spirit - master of the home, and setting the serge (tethering pole) are being revived. So are the customs and rituals related to protection of the child to be born and the mother-to-be. The modern funeral ritual known in the nineteenth century underwent Christianization, and all its separate elements still exist. A certain stereotypic behavior is shown in the forms of expression of sorrow and in not visiting the burial ground after three years. Traditional customs and rituals such as respect of sacred trees, spirits of places, dwelling, fire, and adherence to hunting belief, according to D.G. Bravina, were always adhered to in the past and remain doing so today. The increasing interest in traditional religious beliefs and shamanism in the last decade is not religious but cultural character. It is a result of the growth of national self-awareness and hence follows the aspiration for use of all levels of traditional culture, including shamanism.<sup>19</sup>

Professional art of the Sakhas got great support from the state in the 1990s. In this period, the development of professional art of the Sakhas showed two main tendencies: Yakut art gradually came into the cultural space of Russia and the world through demonstrations of the main achievements and professionalisation of new forms of national art. The network of art and culture establishments widened: The National Circus, Sakhafilm, the Theatre of Humour and Satire "Naara suokhtar" appeared. Today, 6 theatres, a circus, a cinema company, and a concert orchestra in the town of Aldan, 106 music schools for children, 560 clubs, 537 libraries, and 78 museums are property of the state.

On a whole, great changes took place in the spiritual culture of the Sakhas in the twentieth century. A system of national education was created; Yakut writing, literature, and art developed; and the national intelligentsia was formed for the first time in the history of the Sakhas. Although spiritual public life during the years of Soviet power differed in ideology, the evolution of the cultural movement itself did not stop. Of course, there were finds and losses in its development. In the twentieth century, the Sakha culture

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<sup>19</sup> Bragina D.G. Modern ethnic and cultural processes among the Sakha people. - Yakutsk, 1996. - P. 53-77.

got a new civilized quality. The principal achievement was the development of the main forms of European culture - education, literature, and art - which preserved its national nucleus but at the same time was influenced by the West.

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