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Traditional Costume as a Reflection of the Ethnic Culture of the Altai People

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The national costume of Altai has accumulated all the experience of the Altai people. In its culturological aspect, the costume represents a code of spiritual values, an artistic and symbolic reflection of the world outlook of the Altai ethnos. The surrounding natural and socio-cultural environment has determined the context, in which the Altai national costume exists: its «practical» philosophy, its religious senses and its artistic tradition, the people's rituals and their way of living. The culturological function of the Altai national costume becomes a way of reflecting the Altai national world order and their ethnical self-identification.

Keywords: national costume; ethnos; symbol; sign; culture; myth; world outlook.

National costume is included into the semiotic sphere of the traditional national culture both as a sign and as a symbol of artistic and creative expressiveness. Its imagery and stylistic structure has capaciously and vividly included ethnical, ethical, artistic and aesthetical concepts of the nation, its history, mentality, its system of values, and the level of its spiritual and material culture.

National costume is formed in the course of centuries and under the direct influence social and economic, cultural and historical, natural and geographical factors. It accumulates all the social and cultural experience of the ethnos, and is comprehended by the society as a specific code by means of the semiotic system. It gives new and wide opportunities for researching the national culture and everyday life, ethnocultural

self-consciousness, national mentality, features of traditional crafts and folklore, and the culture-historical process of the nation's development in general.

The surrounding natural and socio-cultural environment has determined the context, in which the Altai national costume exists: its «practical» philosophy, its religious senses and its artistic tradition, the people's rituals and their way of living. The national costume of the Altai people is an indispensable part of the ritual syncretism that reflects the origin of such various types of creative activities as songs, dance, instrumental music, games, pieces of verbal art and ritual attributes. The utilitarian aspect of the national costume is penetrated with the aesthetical, the same way as it is in rituals in general, while the philosophical, religious, and

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moral aspects are presented as the axiological and artistic.

In many theoretical works, the costume is considered to be a part of the material culture, being closely connected with all the processes of its development. Let us take the generalizing works on costume history by B. Brun and M. Tilke for example. The semiotic aspect of culture is well considered in the works by such researchers as A. Belyaev, Yu.M. Lotman. The problem of the general and the specific within the traditional symbolic stereotypes system has been developed by A.A. Artyukh and T.T. Kosmina.

As a part of the national husbandry, the national Altai costume was first mentioned in the XIX century in the works of such researchers as V.V. Radlov, V.I. Verbitsky, A.V. Anokhin, S.P. Shvetsov and others, who had been travelling around the Altai Region.

The first full description of the national Altai costume was made in the work «The Garments of the Altai People» by the famous ethnographer L.P. Potapov (Potapov, 1951).

Some details about the clothes of Altai were mentioned in «The Historical and Ethnographical Atlas of Siberia» and in the work «Types of the Outer Garments of the Siberian Peoples».

The modern state of the national Altai costume was described in the works of N.I. Shatinova, Y.P. Zaitseva, N.A. Tadina, V.P. Dyakonova and A.V. Edokov.

The interpretation of the national clothing tradition in the modern everyday and theatrical costumes has been made in the work «The National Costume of Altai» by N.I. Shatinova and Y.P. Zaitseva, where the authors present national theatrical costumes of various ethnic groups living in the territory of Altai. As the ethnographer N.I. Shatinova notes, «the national theatrical costume plays an important role in the true reflection of the historical and modern reality» (Shatinova, 1990).

Researcher V.P. Dyakonova presents a detailed ethnographical description of the national Telengt costume: its cut, details, decorations etc. in her work «The Altai Peoples» (Dyakonova, 2001).

Art historian A.V. Edokov studies the history of arts and crafts of Gorny Altai and pays much attention to the traditions of the Altai peoples' garments in his work «Poetics of the National Costume». To A.V. Edokov's opinion, the national clothes is a part of the national material culture which is closely related to all the processes of its development: «Studying the history of the clothes, its variations and types in the framework of one nation leads to better understanding of the culture development process and the specifics of the national art in particular» (Edokov, 2002).

Therefore, on the modern stage of the ethnographical science development much empirical data concerning history of the traditional Altai costume, the fabrics it is made of, some separate parts of it and accessories has been collected; though by the present time no culturological analysis of the national costume based on semiotic studies has been performed yet.

To our mind, approaching to the traditional national Altai costume as to an axiological and multifunctional phenomenon enables us to disclose the national cultural world outlook of the ethnos.

The main principles of classification of the national Altai costume are the following: gender, season, status, physiological and social features. All the mentioned features are usually represented in a symbolic manner. For example, gender features in male and female costumes are expressed not only in the cut, but also in the certain ornamentation. Ornaments are known to be one of the most stable elements of folk arts. «Alaka»/«menandr» ornament is obligatory for the traditional male costume. According to the

explanation given by the region historian I.V. Shodoev, «alaka is a cult sign of a generation power. It is used in male clothes, belts, stirrups and so on» (Shodoev, 1997). In the folk art of the Altai peoples, various modifications of the «alaka» ornament are widely spread, though «continuity» which is meant to be its main feature remains unchangeable. The visual feature of «the eternal» transfers into a symbolic meaning of alternation of generations. As far as continuation of generation in the Altai peoples' culture is related to men, «alaka» becomes a symbol of the male gender.

In traditional female clothes, the «chychalkay» ornament is used, which is originally considered to be a female decoration. The given ornament visually repeats the «male» pattern, but in a finer way. The «chychalkay» ornament is a symbol of the feminine and of the female gender in the modern national costume. It can be seen not only on the clothes, but also on some utensils and other objects of the everyday life. «Chychyrkay» is equivalent to «chychalkay» – it is embroidered with the colours of the rainbow. Visually, it consists of direct lines that repeat the colours of the rainbow. The given type of pattern is often met on the Altai women's traditional garment called «chegedek» (long sleeveless clothes).

«Chegedek» is also a symbolic attribute which expresses the woman's status in the society. Up till nowadays, the woman wearing a chegedek, in the Altai culture is recognized as a married woman, i.e. having a husband and some children. «Chegedek is a long, vest-type sleeveless clothes that has been an obligatory garment for married women. Chegedek is prepared for the wedding day and is put on the girl in the course of her wedding ceremony» (Dyakonova, 2001).

Nowadays, though various fabrics and accessories are used in making a chegedek, its form and symbolic details remain the same.

Symbolism of chegedek is also determined by the fact that «tul kelin»/widows do not have the right to wear this kind of clothes.

As a garment for the married woman chegedek has unchangeable attributes which are also of symbolic nature.

«Beldush» is a metallic decoration, which is sewed down to the chegedek. «On one side of the chegedek they sew a metallic molded decoration called “beldush” which women use for carrying their kerchiefs, bunches of keys and their children's umbilical cords, sewed into some leather pieces. According to their number and the form one can know the number of children they have and their gender, thus, umbilical cords of the boys have the form of powder flask, and of the girls are triangular or square» (Terner, 1983).

«Beldush» is a symbol of motherhood and a domestic goddess. Similar role is played by the female head-dress called «syuuri byoryuk», which is made of black lambskin. «Syuuri byoryuk» used to be an obligatory attribute of a married woman, so the status feature stands out to the first place again. Moreover, the form of the hat has also been of big importance: «the skyward spire of the hat rests on a dome-shaped foundation and symbolizes prosperity and wellbeing» (Edokov, 2001).

One more symbolic detail of the outer garments of the Altai people is a cuff. The sleeve of the fur-coat ends with a rounded wedge cuff which covers the hand. The given detail is related to the archaic mythological world outlook of the Altai people. Afraid of their supreme deity Erlic, the Altai people used to cover their faces with long cuffs. Later this detail became only an attribute of the female fur-coat related to a ritual called «kaiyndash» which was observed by married women. In the ritual culture of the Altai people, every married woman had to honour her father-in-law. Thereat, she had no right to show him her body, to pronounce his name and

so on. Therefore the ritual determined the cut of the female outer garment cuff which was called «kelin».

A kind of plait decoration called «shanky» that is a part of full-aged Altai girl's costume is also of semiotic nature. In the culture of the Altai people, gender-age differentiation and social status expression is of high importance, that is why «sha²kylu bala» decoration was used as a special sign of a marriageable girl. This decoration consists of cowrie shells called «jylamash», which are braided into every plait with special ropes – «tyushkins», threaded through metallic eyelets of round embossed buttons, or «topchys». Wearing sha²ky was not only an indicator of the girl's status, but also regulated her special behaviour. Various knots, ropes, buttons, metallic eyelets, and shells symbolized the girl's innocence and her inaccessibility. That is why she was considered being «baylu» – pure, and she was demanded to observe special patterns of behaviour which involved limitation of entertainment and learning the household keeping.

The symbolism of colours of the national costume also plays an important role. In ethnography, «colour» is perceived not only as an obligatory feature of the natural or artificial environment, but also as a peculiar and significant part of spiritual experience of the mankind, one of its primary forms of fixation and systematization (Terner, 1983, Samarina, 1992).

Ethical and aesthetical associations caused by the colours are considered by the ethnographers, first of all, as an element of traditional ethnical culture.

Traditionally, the Altai people used all the spectrum of the rainbow colours in their

costumes. The colour scale had a special sacral meaning. For example, the national round hat «bolchok boruk» used to be made of lambskin with its furry side in, and covered by dark self-coloured fabric. The edge of the hat used to be decorated with some light (usually red) material and fringed by a narrow strip of the otter fur. The top of the hat used to be covered by a small circle, made of red fabric, which was decorated with a tassel made of coloured threads and hanging on a short string of beads down to the shoulders. In this case, the red colour is symbolic. As it is noticed by A.N. Mayzina, «the Altai people associated the red colour with blood and related it with physical strength, power, youth, beauty and health. It is connected with the fact, that the red colour is related to warm colours and differs by its brightness and intensity according to its physical characteristics (Mayzina, 2008). In its culturological aspect, the red colour carries a positive charge and is a symbol of life. In the world outlook of the Altai people, the red colour was associated with the sun, fire and was an amulet in its sacral meaning. Thus, usage of red in the Altai hat had the function of protection.

The carried analysis of various elements of the traditional Altai costume enables us to mark from the culturological point of view that their garments, though being an everyday-life attribute, always have a deep symbolic meaning. The costume carries a certain social code, which allows any member of their society to decipher the meaning. The culturological function of the national costume becomes a way of reflecting the national Altai world order and their ethnical self-identification.

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Традиционный костюм как отражение этнической культуры алтайцев

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Алтайский национальный костюм аккумулировал многовековой опыт этноса. В культурологическом аспекте костюм выступает как код духовных ценностей, как художественно-символическое отражение картины мира алтайцев. Окружающая природная и социокультурная среда обусловили контекст, в котором существовал алтайский народный костюм: его «практическую» философию, религиозные смыслы и художественную традицию, обычаи и образ жизни людей. Культурологическая функция алтайского костюма становится способом отражения национального алтайского миропорядка и этнической самоидентификации.

Ключевые слова: народный костюм; этнос; символ; знак; культура; миф; мировоззрение.
