

## Letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” by A. E. Kulakovsky: setting and features of the problem of survival of indigenous peoples of the North in the early 20th century

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### ABSTRACT

The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing interest in the new interpretations of social issues of living in the early 20th century, and from this perspective, in the scientific heritage of A. E. Kulakovsky (1877-1926) as an original thinker, who worried about the fate of the indigenous people inhabiting a large territory of the North-Eastern part of Russia. In this regard, the present work has a special significance, having three handwritten versions, but being banned in the Soviet era as a product of the bourgeois-nationalist idea. It was first published in the early 1990s. In this regard, the purposes of this study are to show the author's firm rejection of the revolutionary path in the plight of the Yakut people; to give logical conclusions about the role of intellectuals and well-off section of the society in the improvement of the level of cultural and economic life. The research was done within the framework of the methodology of textual analysis of the letter to the author's contemporaries. The article reveals new aspects in the study of the letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” in the context of the ideas presented in the major publications of declarations of Russian intelligentsia.

### KEYWORDS

indigenous peoples, problems of survival, social functions of  
intelligentsia

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### Introduction

In the creative heritage of the Yakut writer and original thinker Aleksei Eliseevich Kulakovsky (1877-1926) we can discover a special view of the world and the original nobility of ancient traditions reflected in the beliefs and culture of his native people. His creative interpretations of images and facts of life given

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in his works of art and socio-philosophical works are always characterized by realism of the images and thoughts about time in the contexts of topical problems of the particular region. The following works: “Do Russians have a right to be proud of their name?” (1897), “The main values of the poetry of Pushkin” (1987), “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” (1912), “Yakut proverbs and sayings” (1925), a series of articles about the Yakut language (1921-1925), “Rules of the Yakut poetry” (1924) are devoted to the study of literature, poetics of artistic creativity and the study of the socio-economic problems of indigenous peoples. The scientific classification of the animal and vegetal life of Yakutia (“Types of animal and vegetable kingdoms known to Yakutia people”, 1917-1919) is very useful natural science material. In connection with the actualization in the human sciences of modern ways of understanding of social issues of living in the early 20th century, there is an increased interest in the scientific heritage of A. E. Kulakovsky, who worried about the fate of indigenous peoples inhabiting a large territory of the North-Eastern part of Russia. In this regard, special importance is attached to his work “To the Yakut Intelligentsia”, first published in the early 1990s. Today, there are three handwritten versions of autographs of A.E. Kulakovsky kept in public and private archives in Yakutsk (Kulakovsky, 1912). These valuable sources, bearing a date 1912, placed by the author, were prohibited in the Soviet time as manuscripts carrying the bourgeois-nationalist ideas. Work of A.E. Kulakovsky, written in the form of a letter/appeal to his contemporaries, is a serious scientific study formulating the fundamental problems in the study of the features of the entire North-East region of Russia (Kulakovsky, 2012). Proofs of this are a convincing definition of goals and objectives, consistent refinement and expansion of evidence-based findings, including the prospects for further work on specific areas of knowledge. The content of the work “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” is distinguished by original and courageous approaches to the social and historical issues related to the natural course of society development (Kulakovsky, 2012). The particular interest of contemporary researchers in the presented work can be noticed in the Proceedings of the international conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” (Moscow, November 21-22, 2012), where some of the new provisions lay emphasis on the “volitional idea” philosophy as the basis of the message of A..E. Kulakovsky (Chagin, 2013), which is of some importance to world literature (Tevs, 2013).

In studies of the significance of missionary activity amid the northern ethnic groups, S. A. Mousalimas next to the name of St. Innocent Veniaminov mentions Aleksei Kulakovsky, educator of Sakha people (Mousalimas, 2004). Yakut literary scholars give pride of place to the works of A. E. Kulakovsky in their works devoted to the study of the poetics of national literature (Burtseva and Burtseva, 2004).

### Goals and Hypothesis

The aim of the study is to reveal the new provisions in the message of A. E. Kulakovsky regarding the problems of survival of the Sakha people in the early 20th century, such as the rejection by the author of the revolutionary way in the

plight of the Yakut nation; and his logical conclusions about the role of intellectuals and the well-off section of the society in the improvement of the level of cultural and economic life. Examination of the text of the letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” reveals several aspects of the Kulakovsky's appeal to his contemporaries which have been unnoticed during previous studies, such as the correlation of his ideas with thoughts about the fate of Russia and the Russian people presented in the major publications of declarations of Russian intelligentsia, and with the content of the instructions of the governor of Yakutsk region I. I. Kraft. From this perspective, one of the essential points of the hypothesis of the present study is the clarification of the meaning of the Kulakovsky's pseudonym: Eksekulekh Eleksei, translated into Russian as “Eagle Aleksei” is or “Aleksei with an eagle”.

### Methodological Framework

The work is performed within the framework of the textual analysis of the letter addressed to his contemporaries. Special attention is given to explicitation of subtexts, allusions and the author's style. In this respect, the authors desired to present the phenomenon of A. E. Kulakovsky through the example of an analysis of his work with minimal distortions of meaning; showing that he was a person with a special talent to combine and integrate the national traditions in the transnational scope of culture serving the foundation of the spiritual identity of the people.

### Results and Discussion

A.E. Kulakovsky deeply understood and appreciated the way of living of his people as the basis of their original spiritual values. In this respect, his social ideas presented in the letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” are based on the logical interaction of “development” and “progress” correlated in the light of historical realia with the concepts of “nation” and “people”. In systematization and elucidation of the main theses of the letter, the author first considers the internal consistency of these dialectical phenomena. Justifying his hypothesis by his addressing to the facts such as statistics of the population of indigenous peoples of Siberia; the interests of America, China and Japan in the territory of Yakutia, he intentionally increases the importance of the private issues in relation to the main object of his reflection. In this respect, the vivid emotive style of the first part of the letter is confirmed by a clear definition of the message recipient: the author's touch in the text can be noticed not so much in the expression of feelings, but in an effort to heighten the reader's interest in the discussed subject. Thus, the creative context of a series of systematized provisions and conclusions of the author is built with a focus on receptive contexts with their compensatory function in relation to the ideas put forward. Let us consider the beginning of text:

“You, gentlemen, may think that I am obsessed by a mama or hypochondria when expressing the idea of the possibility and even inevitability of the extinction of the Yakuts. You may think so but I am deeply convinced of the

critical position of the Yakuts at present. How can those fatal clouds collected ominously in our turbid sky stay imperceptible?" (Kulakovsky, 2012).

The main topic of the discourse (and its importance) is specified by the author in a logical continuation of the title, the historical value of which is confirmed by the date of creation of the work. In the manuscript, the time and place of its creation "in 1912. May. Kachikatsi", as well as the title of the work and the author's name at the end of the text are written in red ink, and the body of text is written in dark blue ink (Kulakovsky, 1912).

Vivid dynamics of the thoughts of A.E. Kulakovsky is dialogical due to the fact that the author considers the exchange of views on the issues raised on an equal footing with the readers, revealing also the socio-historical context. Namely, the author's natural and convincing suggestion to judge by the idea and the content of the letter about the issues of concern to the society (especially educated people) living in the Lena region. Throughout the whole text he periodically addresses to readers, not only sharing and predicting their thoughts, but sometimes entering into a dialogue with them persuading them to understand certain issues contrarily to the author's opinion.

The special importance of the manuscript of A.E. Kulakovsky for those to whom he refers, is confirmed by the history of the keeping of this unique document, its first publications in the early 1990s, nearly 80 years after being written, as well as by special attention of Yakutia leading scientists and major public figures, and a wide interest of readers. Based on the documents and the actual events of the last decade of the 20th century, these issues are covered in the work of V.N. Ivanov, in a special publication of the Institute of Humanitarian Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) (Burtsev, 2002). One of the main theses of this work is the following conclusion: "We have a unique document in which for the first time in the history of political thought in Yakutia, one of the most urgent problems of Russian reality is offered for an open discussion: the problem of the extinction of the Yakut people. The author of the letter enforced his statements with weighty arguments which do not allow us to suspect him of prejudgement or being "possessed by some mania or suspiciousness" as he wrote (Burtsev, 2002).

At the time of the creation of this work, Alexey Kulakovsky was widely known as a miscellaneous connoisseur of the life of the native people, as a poet, although there had been only a few of his poems published in the newspapers. He read (performed) his works in front of the audience, including the poem "The Shaman's Dream". Kulakovsky diligently collected folklore and ethnographic materials throughout the vast territory of the Yakutsk region, covering great distances by dint of his strength and commitment, moral courage and generosity of soul. In the mentioned poem, written in 1910 in the form of the monologue of a soothsayer shaman, he talks about the growing social unrest and world war, calls on people to be ready to overcome the extraordinary turmoil. Special role of folk images and motifs in the philosophical poem are revealed in one of our studies (Burtsev, 2013). The significance of the national poetics in the creativity of the Yakut authors of the time has been confirmed in the articles of modern researchers (Ivanov, 2002). We can mention the fact that the poem "The

Shaman's Dream" has been translated into European languages; last year the text of the original work was published in Japanese (Sivtseva-Maksimova, 2013).

In his message "To the Yakut Intelligentsia", A.E. Kulakovsky provides answers to the most pressing problems of the time. Probably no one else can so truthfully and clearly set specific tasks to his contemporaries, so that they have clear guidelines during the intensification of the economic and spiritual crisis in Russia. On the other hand, in 1910, he enlightened his credulous listeners in regard of these problems in the poem "The Shaman's Dream" with his undisputed figurative statement about the time coming when "the Sakha nature would be transformed again". In this regard, the title "To the Yakut Intelligentsia" contains an amplified idea of appealing, the content reveals the author's point of view on current issues, realized through the reader's empathy. It follows therefrom that the title of the work contains a semantically open image of the time in a peculiar form of expression of hoping on the Yakut intelligentsia as a leading stratum of society back then, regarding which it would be more appropriate to use "will be" rather than "is". That is why in one of the variants of the manuscript A.E. Kulakovsky refers to specific recipients showing no intention to publish his letter. But his manuscript has undeniable value as a document reflecting the features of the time when it was the intelligentsia of Russia that sought to maintain spiritual values against a background of intensifying militant ideas of the division of society into antagonistic classes to implement radical change of lifestyle at any convenient time without thinking about the consequences.

In the early 20th century, the Russian intelligentsia's opposition to the growth of revolutionary ideas was expressed by the development of religious and philosophical movement. About that time in the book of Fr. Basil (V.V. Zenkovsky) "The history of Russian philosophy" we read the following: "In 1901, public religion and philosophy discussions started in St. Petersburg at the initiative of a group of writers led by D.S. Merezhkovsky. These conversations, records of which were published in the "New Way" journal, were the first manifestation of a new spiritual transformation of Russian thinkers. Soon, the religious and philosophical societies were opened in Moscow and Kiev uniting huge numbers of sympathizers. In 1902, a collection of articles entitled "Problems of idealism" was published... In 1909, another wonderful collection of articles "Milestones" arrived, harshly condemning Russian nihilism. It was sold within a few months: two months later, it was necessary to publish the second edition" (Rufova, 2014).

We believe that A.E. Kulakovsky was familiar with these collections of articles. In his letter, a realistic point of view on social issues is based on the denial of "nihilism", which is reflected in the definitions of social and economic functions of the wealthy part of the population, in unambiguous denial of the struggle against "kulaks" and in non-acceptance of the division of society into classes. This can be confirmed by the text:

"No, ladies and gentlemen, in order to increase the prosperity of the Yakuts it is necessary to increase their level of culture and make them able to

understand life and phenomena of it. Some discuss it from one point of view: they say that to increase the Yakut level of culture is possible only when they are well provided for, but as you see, personally I do not share this opinion. Therefore, I think that our “toyons” (the Yakut for “head of the tribe, or any authority, and/or rich and powerful person” – T.) should be left alone. The kulaks will be destroyed (and fast) in themselves under the pressure of the terrible enemy of theirs, which is competition. Currently the hope is only for toyons and intelligentsia: all of the former are patriots, that is why they can help much with good advice, good examples and material support; the role of the latter is to be initiators, agitators and leaders”... (Kulakovsky, 2012).

A.E. Kulakovsky was against the secularization of public conscience, as evidenced by the recognition of “endowment of the Orthodox faith” by the Russian church to his own people (Kulakovsky, 2012). Thus, he did not share the ideas of “Milestones” opponents who put forward in the book “Intellectuals and people” (1902) the idea of secularization in favor of revolutionary heroism.

The only right way of national development was seen by A.E. Kulakovsky in the gradual significant reformation of the society living. His thoughts about the land use, agriculture and animal husbandry are not only special advices concerning work organization, but they also reveal the problems of ecology, serving the basis for such issues as the need for an attitude of care toward nature and private property socio-economic issues. In the agriculture sections, he appropriately takes into account the scientific and technical discoveries of his time, and also considers the instructions of I.I. Kraft, the governor of Yakutsk region. Until now this field of his work has been left out of consideration. For confirmation we will refer to the significant publications (Rufova, 2015). In the sections dedicated to education, public life and enterprises, the conclusions about the need for specialized primary schools and the importance of libraries are also within the frame of plans of the governorate social activities (Suzuki Dzhuniti, 2015). However, ideas of A.E. Kulakovsky regarding the cultural level of population, differentiation of forms and methods of crediting, organization of the labour and the life of workers of the Lena gold mines look really attractive for the modern readers as they truly identify the necessary measures needed for the correct resolving of these issues. A.E. Kulakovsky proposes the labor field development not only in the areas traditional for the indigenous people, but he also clearly shows the need for organizing the effective forms of active participation in a variety of contracting works, including the monopoly of gold mining and fisheries. He also emphasizes the economic importance of cooperation with large companies of Moscow. At the same time, he assigns to the intelligentsia the role of a reliable leader and organizer of progressive activities on equal terms with the big landowners and merchants, whose welfare is being improved. They are those who are “the core of the Yakut people”, according to A.E. Kulakovsky (Kulakovsky, 2012).

The author of the letter does not talk about the aggravating revolutionary situation, although it could be said that in the early 20th century Yakutia was one of the regional centers actively planting radical ideas, as evidenced by the Yakutsk rebellion of the political exiles in 1904-1905 and the Lena events of



1912. However, the main concern of A.E. Kulakovsky is a gradual extinction of the indigenous people living in such a vast territory. He chooses the most indisputable argument which is easily proved by the history of civilization and by the evolution of geopolitical relations. In this regard, his appeal to his contemporaries in the final part of his thoughts is very significant:

“I am warning you just about one thing: whatever personal opinion you have concerning the migration of Russians into the region, the Yakut extinction and “yellow danger”, you should not give way to deceptive false hopes, as well as you should not nourish the hope in others; if you do not agree with me, then at least do not prove the opposite, i.e. the desired better facts. You should act and agitate only in favor and for the sake of the culture the spreading of which has become a topical necessity in our century. Although (let us say, choosing the better side) and besides terrible ghosts of migration and extinction...” (Kulakovsky, 2012).

Another significant phenomenon related to the present work of A.E. Kulakovsky is that he ended his letter “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” by signing for the first time as “Eksekulekh Eleksei”. For the scholars studying his work it is of fundamental importance as being the direct author's indication: it is the same Aleksei Kulakovsky, who wrote the “The Shaman's Dream” poem. We can assume that the dignified nickname was given to the poet by the people having compared him with the white wise shaman, turning in the poem into a mythical eagle observing the world from heaven.

The role of intelligentsia is determined by its function of guiding and organizing factor in many independent activities in the national progress. In this regard, the very personality of A.E. Kulakovsky serves an example to the Yakut people. One of the events of his last year of life was a horseback trip to Oymyakon. Covering about five hundred kilometers of difficult mountain road, he went to call the people to stop the armed confrontation, the last echo of the civil war. His wise words became a truly humane conclusion of the most difficult period in the history of Yakutia (Zenkovsky, 1991).

### Conclusion

The article reveals new aspects in the study of the message “To the Yakut Intelligentsia” in the context of the ideas of Russian philosophical thought and perspective plans for development of the Yakut region. If the previous studies of this work have generally enlighten only the issues of survival of indigenous peoples of Siberia, the text analysis reveals a fundamental position of A.E. Kulakovsky consisting in his persuasive warning against participation in the radical reorganization of the foundations of society. He considers it the most important solution, even in relation to the issues of migration and extinction.

Axiological issues have been identified in relation to the creative heritage of the intellectual personality. Results of the study of the text by identifying motives and further details enhance the understanding of “the phenomenon of A.E. Kulakovsky”, who in the discourse about the fate of the Yakut people makes compelling arguments relating to the real correlation of socio-political issues reflecting his principles of life. In this regard, the content of his message

“To the Yakut Intelligentsia” enlightens also the value of his artistic images, which laid the foundation to the national literature.

The results of the presented analysis extend known perspectives in the study of the historical document of the early 20th century as issues of culture, its dependence on social conditions, religious and scientific outlook.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

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