

ENVIRONMENTAL HERMENEUTICS: ETHNIC AND ECOLOGICAL TRADITIONS IN AESTHETIC DIALOGUE WITH NATURE

IRINA BOLDONOVA

*Buryat State University, Smolina 24, 670000, Ulan-Ude, Russia, e-mail:
irina_duncan@mail.ru*

Received: 4th February 2016, **Accepted:** 11th April 2016

ABSTRACT

The article presents dialogic attitude towards nature and focuses on the aesthetic form of interaction with environment via folklore and imaginative writing. The article analyzes the development of scientific thought from human ecology to environmental hermeneutics. Hermeneutic methodology is used in the field of “aesthetics of nature”, therefore, the author applies hermeneutic categories such as tradition, historically effective consciousness, hermeneutic circle, application to cultural heritage of one of Siberia’s natives and proves the advantages, heuristic value of these categories in analyzing dialogue with nature. Aesthetic dialogue with nature is studied on the example of ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryat nomads, who historically migrated across Central Asia, nowadays live around Lake Baikal. The author argues that revitalizing ethnic and ecological traditions in folklore and contemporary national literature presents a hermeneutic dialogue with nature and considers it a valuable resource for ethical assumptions and ecological education for sustainable development.

Key words: nature, aesthetic dialogue, environmental hermeneutics, environmental ethics, ethnic and ecological traditions, the Buryats, nomadic culture.

INTRODUCTION

Among all forms of dialogue conversation with nature contains heuristic resources in terms of contemporary globalizing context of society. Environmental interpretation of ethnic and ecological traditions in folklore and imaginative writing helps to understand ecosystems better and makes contribution to ecological ethics.

As it seems, observation and reflection can be considered to be cognitive acts, which are relevant to each human who can express interest in nature. At the same time, the levels of cognition and reflection are defined by more qualitative abilities and distinguishing features of a human being, such as intellectual, emotional, esthetic, and moral ones, awareness of oneself in reality, and specifically, one’s relationship with nature. A human being living in harmony with the environment feels inner peace from its contemplating, understanding its infinity in time and space, intrinsic value and the right of non-penetration into its reality.

It is generally assumed that fundamental change in views upon scientific rationality and the dialogue with nature took place in the 20th century as a result of intensive research on nature

and emergence of a new level of inquiries turned from the attitude to nature as a mechanic system to the capacity of interpreting and appreciating it. In the system theory, V. Vernadsky's noosphere concept (Vernadsky, 1991), universal evolutionism of N. Moiseev (Moiseev, 2001), and in the sustainable development concept nature and society are equal parts of the same system.

According to V. Vernadsky, creative human behavior within the biosphere improves the measurable physical forms of the biosphere as the biosphere is unable to improve itself without human activity. Vernadsky introduced a new term noosphere and underscored that the results of the action of life processes on the physical environment are a natural phenomenon. According to his ideas, scientific thought and changes in the biosphere are the same natural (planetary) phenomena caused by rational human activity (Vernadsky, 1991). These ideas were passed to a new stage of philosophy of nature.

I. Prigogine and I. Stengers were one of the first who declared a radical transformation of views on nature. They stated that scientific inquiry was not a monologue, but a vivid dialogue with nature, endorsing noosphere ethics (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). We suppose that in the roots of their approach there is a heuristic potential for question and active questioning, which leads to hermeneutic ideas.

Russian scientist and famous founder of the passionarity theory in ethnogenesis L. Gumilev wrote about reciprocal impact of nature and humans. The nature, when destroyed ruins man in its turn (Gumilev, 2007). The well-known idea of passionarity, no doubt, is closely connected with the dialogue between man and nature.

Another Russian scholar, V. Alekseev, defines the so-called human ecology (*man's ecology – экология человека*) as a discipline studying humans in complex realization of their characteristics and producing impacts on nature. On the contrary, the impact of nature upon society should be considered in terms of both anthropology and ecology. A special aspect of inquiry is biology of humans, its influence being realized through social behavior of people. That is why V. Alekseev analyzes the three-component relationship *human culture – human biology – geographic environment*. As we can see in this type of relationship *human culture* is related both to *human biology* and *geographic environment*. From our point of view, it brings together biological, geographic, physical aspects. Therefore, the scheme *culture – nature* presents a form of dialogue with the inclusion of the biological nature of humans. In the dialogue *man – nature* one more component, namely, *man's biological nature* should be taken into consideration.

V. Alekseev defines five epochs of the impact of global expansion of the human civilization on nature and space. He calls these epochs historical evolution process of the relationship *nature – society*. The general idea of the evolution process is based on the increasing ecological crisis and reflects conflicts between humans and nature (Alekseev, 2002). The scholar predicts the danger of further conflict development and globalizing crisis. The situation in the contemporary world, as the author of this article argues, can be interpreted using the idea of a true dialogue: the alternative approach to the “culture – nature” binary opposition.

Analyzing the dialogue between man and nature today, the urban ecologist B. Loetsch concentrates on the idea of how humans as the most developed visual creatures can influence the nature. B. Loetsch underlines the role of visual perception in the dialogue with nature. He refers to the evolutionary theory of cognition developed by Konrad Lorenz, who states that our image of the world arose from a dialogue with Nature and it has become adaptation dialogue between the Nature around us and the Nature within us. Nowadays, however, people almost forgot the natural ability to admire the space around us. Many nervous and psychological disorders of civilization are the results of an unconscious shock of losing

Nature. B. Loetsch is absolutely sure that the landscapes of national parks contribute to the reduction of the so-called “mental starvation” and describes the case with the German photographer Ehlert who supplies hospitals with posters from the last European wilderness areas while the doctors observe their pronounced positive effect on their patients. He explains the producing effect by a physiological ability to fix the beauty of nature. He emphasizes that a human eye is not only a receptor of stimuli, but also a transmitter and not only does it see but it also looks and the expression on our face is also called a *look* (B. Loetsch). This is one of the forms of man being involved in a dialogue with nature returning to his initial stage of existence in a natural environment.

Aesthetic approaches to nature

The dialogue with nature can be realized through aesthetic reflection of nature. The character of cognition in aesthetics depends on the object's features and the human's personal traits. A special status among them is given to creative activity and artistic vision. Aesthetic appreciation of nature includes value and axiological moments, which are referred to as ontological aspect of an object and as epistemological aspect of a person and one's own value positions. In his consciousness there are features, typical for ontological classification of world existence, so that a consideration of natural beauty is reflected and the result axiologically evaluated in his creative activity.

Aesthetics of nature as a scientific discipline is relatively new. In the Russian scientific thought V. Solovyev was one of the first thinkers who wrote about interrelations of natural philosophy and aesthetics in his article *Beauty in Nature* in 1889 (Solovyev, 1998). In it he applied understanding beauty to natural environment. These ideas were supported by his contemporaries. In 1895 V. Rozanov implemented critical interpretation of Solovyev's ideas and published his article *What Does Beauty of Nature Express?*, in which he understood beauty as an intrinsic value of nature. In his view, beauty exists as a sign of energy and is inherent to development (Rozanov, 1895).

It is generally assumed that the aesthetic value of nature is referred to environment, first and foremost, to outer space or landscape. In anthrosociogenesis the nature's beauty is unveiled to humans step by step. In early stages of humankind's evolution, or human's total dependence on nature, the natural world itself stays unreachable for aesthetic appreciation. Unknown, severe, full of secrets, the nature is opposed to humans as a dangerous force, its laws remaining mysterious for men. Step by step in a process of practical development, man learnt to control nature and not to fear it, but rule over it to sustain his needs. From this time a new approach to relationship of humans and nature, society and environment began. Humans learnt to evaluate nature not only for their benefit, but discovered the abilities within themselves to admire its beauty.

Objective expression of the aesthetics of nature remains the way for reality reflection through emotional and personal experience of poets or artists. Psychological, historical, cultural, and meaningful prejudices and pre-assumptions of that person become the key for the interpretation of subjectively expressed images in aesthetic consciousness of this person. The process of aesthetic comprehension of nature is constructed in connections with features of the natural object itself. The ability to value nature not only as an object of economic use, but also as an image of eternal aesthetic feelings helps discovering the very depth of hidden sense again and again. Creative activity also helps formulating ecological and aesthetic culture as well as social responsibility position. It can advance the truths of environmental ethics through artistic arguments - the foundation for perception and further developing imagination.

According to the widespread tendency in scientific research on the boundary of ecology and traditional aesthetics there appear new and advanced directions of studies. One example is environmental aesthetics. Historically environmental aesthetics in the US has the three branches of scientific knowledge as philosophical aesthetics, land space theory and practice, and early conservation literature. Traditionally the research is based on the ideas of J. Ruskin, W. Morris, then, writers A. Leopold, H. Thoreau, J. Muir, and since 1966 – on R. Hepburn’ ideas. Contemporary debates include the so-called “aesthetics of engagement” by A. Berleant, cognitivism of A. Carlson, some non-cognitive theories of N. Carroll, Y. Saito, Th. Heyd, “integrated aesthetics” of E. Brady and etc. In the XXI century environmental aesthetics expanded the number of its objects from the natural ones to the modified environments and artificial or hand-made objects, (Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy, 2009).

The Russian tradition of environmental aesthetics comes from famous thinkers of Russian orthodox philosophy V. Solovyev, V. Rozanov as stated above, Russian cosmic philosophers, and the philosopher of the 20th century A. Losev, writers and publicists K. Paustovsky, M. Prishvin. Recent studies consist of humanitarian research in the field of aesthetics by K. Dolgov, V. Boreyko, A. Yermolenko, N. Mankovskaya, P. Karako and others. Possible differences lie in the ways of methodology and research methods – Russian studies focus more on literary, artistic reflection and are connected with implicit and metaphoric comprehension. Aesthetics of nature or environmental aesthetics is not specified as a separate philosophical branch of knowledge and is still defined as a part of philosophy of art. Whereas, the American tradition finds grounding in approaches of natural sciences and takes environmental aesthetics more distinctly apart from philosophy of art. Aesthetics of nature in the US is involved in advance studies and apply to urban landscape, specially designed environment, in comparison with which Russian environmental research is more classical and conservative.

Both, Russian and foreign scholars pursue the idea of deep connection between aesthetics and ethics, philosophy of environment. The most important common feature of both traditions is the engagement in educational process and contemporary decision-making process in political and social practices. «Environmental aesthetics has had and will continue to have significance for environmental disciplines and practices. A principal aim of environmental aesthetics is to seek a philosophically informed understanding of aesthetic value and judgment. To this end there is a strong agreement that aesthetic value is non-instrumental and therefore distinct from other instrumental environmental pleasures such as recreation. Criticisms of the scenery model have underscored the extent to which aesthetic valuing reaches beyond mere visual enjoyment to encompass a broad range of experiences—knowledge, emotion, imagination, and all the senses. This view presents a “thicker” concept of the aesthetic experience of landscape, which, in much empirical work on the topic, has been limited to aspects that can be objectified or quantified (e.g., visual or scenic value), thus leaving out key qualitative aspects of valuing nature» (Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy, 2009, p. 320).

The synonymous term *noospheric aesthetics*, which comes to existence in the last two or three decades, means approximately the same as aesthetic approaches to environmental studies. The general idea includes elements of higher aesthetics which studies simple orders and the ability of a human being to observe regularities in natural phenomena, to search for cause and effect produced by natural laws and forces and the global issue of man’s interaction with the natural world in the cultural context. Environmental or noospheric aesthetics is philosophy of ecological balance and harmony between humans and environment.

In the 21st century aesthetics of nature, being the realization of cultural and civilizational development, becomes the very foundation for further evolution of human thoughts in the field of environmental ethics. It means that aesthetics of nature acts as a source for developing thoughts in philosophy, including aesthetics, philosophy of art, philosophy of culture and hermeneutics. The outcome leads to the transformation of the attitude towards nature as a source of food and material wealth. On the contrary, it presupposes elaboration of the view to nature as a source of inspiration, deep reflection, meditation upon inner *Self*, ability for self-perfection and achievement of new possible meanings essential for life.

Environmental hermeneutics

One of the most effective approaches in aesthetics of nature is hermeneutics, which is the theory of understanding as one of the fundamental and the most essential characteristics of being. Coming back to the history of hermeneutic ideas in the development of philosophical thought it is clear that traditional aesthetics based on I. Kant's theory proved its relevance to further inquiries of classics in hermeneutics. H.-G. Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method* unveils the issue. Beauty in nature is expressed intrinsically: "The dissolution of the ancient cosmological thought that assigned man his place in the total structure of being and assigned each entity its goal of perfection gives the world, which ceases to be beautiful as a structure of absolute ends, the new *beauty* of being purposive for us. It becomes "nature", whose innocence consists in the fact that it knows nothing of man or his social vices. Nevertheless, it has something to say to us. As beautiful, nature finds a *language* that brings to *us* an intelligible idea of what mankind is to be" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 51)

Interpreting Gadamer, it should be stated that it is necessary to interpret the dialogue between beautiful nature and appreciating man, then between this author's art with his description of the natural beauty and the addressee, in other words, reader, spectator, or listener. A creating person meets himself in the natural environment. Meanwhile his spiritual power and mental abilities become active in the act of divination. In this process aesthetic ideas appear and as a result become a hermeneutic interpretation of the nature's appeal. Art adds some more nuances to admired natural picture as it goes into a hermeneutic circle and enlarges artistic resources.

Gadamer underlines the idea that humans being look at nature in different ways. Aesthetic significance of nature can be taken, understood and creatively comprehended only by those who were aesthetically educated. Only creative people are able to see, contemplate and adequately transmit beauty of nature. Only artistically developed persons can aesthetically evaluate original beauty (Gadamer, 1987). No doubt, historical effective consciousness of each epoch influences understanding of nature.

In order to educate human beings morally and spiritually in the contemporary society of global challenges a new scientific perspective was introduced by social sciences as a field of interdisciplinary research. It is environmental hermeneutics. This branch of scientific knowledge is mainly developed in the US and Western Europe, the contribution of Russian scholars will be awaited in perspectives, among them there may be named V. Prozersky as the supervisor of the scientific research project, which emphasizes various approaches to environmental aesthetics, taking into consideration hermeneutics as one of possible methodologies (Prozersky, 2013). T. Akindinova is the author of the article about holistic understanding of nature and culture in Goethe's works and reflection of Gadamer's interpretation as the new approaches to nature cognition (Akindinova, 2013). O. Kuznetsova analyzes ecological issues through the angles of artistic, historical and cultural activities (Kuznetsova, 2003). The philologist N. Filyanina focuses on performance of metaphors to expand the horizons of understanding of nature in the framework of ecological hermeneutics

(Filyanina, 2014). In general, ecological (environmental) hermeneutics in Russia concentrates more on moral aspects and relationship of humans and nature as the object of artistic comprehension.

The American tradition of environmental aesthetics is much more developed and has various schools and branches. Among contemporary research should be mentioned the latest publication in scientific literature, for example, B. Treanor ties virtue ethics in environmental philosophy with hermeneutics (Treanor, 2014). G.D. Horrell, F. Stravropoulou, Ch. Hunt and C. Southgate considers hermeneutics in the same range as biblical studies, historical theology and theological ethics, they analyze contemporary hermeneutic possibilities in the context of ecological crisis and the issues of sustainable development (Horrell *et al*, 2010). D.R. Keller uses H.G. Gadamer's theory as the foundation of ecological hermeneutics and presents it as the act of interpreting the impact of technology within the reality (Keller, n.d.). N.M. Bell uses hermeneutic theories to look at how peoples' encounters with the environment by means of interpretation (Bell, 2014). C. Frayne shows a dialogue of experience, language and interpretation, main characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology associated with the philosophy of M. Heidegger (Frayne, 2015). Contemporary research in environmental hermeneutics underlines not only ethical issues, but also epistemological aspects, theological impact and importance of discourse analysis.

F. Clingerman, B. Treanor, M. Drenthen and D. Utsler suggest the following five approaches within environmental hermeneutics. The first direction is the extension of principles of interpretation to environments of any kind (natural, built, or cultural). It is also a framework for interpretive activity in general. The second one contains the interpretation of actual encounters of, or within, environments in order to deepen our understanding of places in direct interactions. In other words, it presupposes a certain relation to the landscape. The third approach refers to a form of nature writing. We think it has much to do with the aesthetics of nature, especially in that part which deals with literature, because it is the form of interpretation of nature by the author as well as the interpretation of the reader. The fourth direction, as F. Clingerman, B. Treanor, M. Drenthen, D. Utsler state, provide a number of approaches of various disciplines to environments, because different sciences interpret nature in different ways and applied disciplines use techniques in their research. The last one is a philosophical stance which understands how the inevitability of what Gadamer called our "hermeneutic consciousness" informs our relationship with environments. An ontological framework necessitates such interpretation (Clingerman *et al*, 2013). In the context of this research the third and the fifth approaches can be used as methodology for research in the field of hermeneutic dialogue in the aesthetics of nature.

Environmental hermeneutics occurs as a form of synthesis between philosophical hermeneutics, environmental philosophy, and environmental ethics. That is why the general list of relatively close branches of knowledge classified by F. Clingerman, B. Treanor, M. Drenthen and D. Utsler should be recognized as very essential. The authors put forward *ecological hermeneutics*, *ecohermeneutics*, *environmental hermeneutics*, *hermeneutics of place*, *hermeneutics of landscape*, and *biological hermeneutics*. Each of these directions of environmental thought reflects the tendencies in contemporary social sciences. Interpretation, as the authors say, has become the ground of environmental philosophy (Clingerman *et al*, 2013)

The specific view of hermeneutics lies in the analysis of historical traditions and their impact on individuals, their being, communication, way of thinking, understanding and the possibility to understand in general. Hermeneutic reflection has a number of advantages, because it includes not only interpretation of messages as they are, but makes consciousness itself the object of reflection and the way of reflection upon mental process. Hermeneutic

consciousness discovers prejudices in each mental speculation, all the way to understanding. Therefore, hermeneutic approach to environmental issues has not yet been applied effectively. However, the current ecological situation all over the world makes mankind think not only at present, but deepen into historical and cultural traditions. As F. Clingerman, B. Treanor, M. Drenthen and D. Utsler wrote, “Environmental hermeneutics offers a fresh way of looking at traditional problems of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics – areas of discourse that hitherto have not been influenced by philosophical hermeneutics to any great degree” (Clingerman *et al*, 2013, p.5). No doubt the prejudices are explained by historicity of our being. Our experience of the world is included into historical experience, which is part of the universal history of civilisation. To understand the world’s history means to grasp the idea of complex interconnection of all stages of history.

The text or the object of interpretation as well as the interpreter find themselves in historically moving hermeneutic situation realizing historically determined limits of their possibilities. The specific characteristics of hermeneutic analysis of dialogue with nature are hidden in a pre-conception of meanings, taken in individual’s historical being. This sort of analysis gives the opportunities to originate interpretation methods and perfects the previous one in the frame of searching consciousness dependence from definite sphere of meanings and historical traditions. The hermeneutic ideas in understanding landscapes are based on the interpretive ability of mind as it is proved by M. Drenthen. Environmental hermeneuticists, according to M. Drenthen, support certain self-interpretations being particularly interested in how specific places and landscapes present themselves to us as significant and meaningful (Drenthen, 2011). The landscape’s appeal is what Gadamer called the acquired language.

The scholar presents a form of dialogue with environment, analyzing the way to understand the self through interpreting nature. M. Drenthen classifies several ways of reading landscapes. Among them there is reading of vertical structure with soil and land. The next way is reading horizontal structure (roads, waterways, zoning, etc.), while the third variant deals with seasonal composition of place (colors, shapes and structures). The forth form is connected with cultural history (roads, buildings, etc.). The most interesting and prominent way of reading (interpreting) landscape is the last one as it leads to some sort of a genuine dialogue with the so called “legible landscape”. However, for deeper understanding of landscape M. Drenthen suggests connecting hermeneutics with environmental identity and ethical responsibilities, “In order to understand the actually existing moral ties between people and their landscapes, we should be open to a new ontology that focuses on the relation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, people and their places. If we want to understand how the legibility of the land is connected with environmental identity and ethical commitment to place, we need a different perspective on legibility and textuality. Whereas semiotics tends to focus on texts as information carriers, hermeneutics tends to look at the way that interpretations play a part in our understanding of ourselves and the world”. M. Drenthen speaks about urban areas. The object of analysis is cultural environment. In the author’s conclusion, dialogue with nature should formulate responsibilities in the relationship (Drenthen, 2011).

As it becomes clear in the previous concept, the field of study of hermeneutics is not only text but various verbal and non-verbal phenomena, i.e. social structures of the society and social relationship, while in environmental hermeneutics this sphere includes natural environment. Gadamer’s hermeneutics describes the whole system of categories generally related to the concept of historically effected consciousness. The hermeneutic approach concentrates attention mostly on the side of perception, i.e. on the receiver and his feedback, giving the chance to create the common atmosphere of “genuine dialogue”. According to

Gadamer, whoever participates in the dialogue with nature is absorbed by a tradition. Our perception of nature is under the influence of past experience, background knowledge and mainly historical and cultural tradition (Gadamer, 1999). These factors affect any conversation, its content and possible outcomes.

The Buryats and nomadic being

Within the frame of hermeneutical dialogue in aesthetics of nature we suggest analysis of ethno-cultural artistic traditions, reflected in folklore, art and literature of the Buryat nation.

The Buryats, or more correctly, the Buryat-Mongols are the northern branch of the Mongolian nation. Over many centuries they lived in most states of Central Asia (for example in the great Xiongnu Empire). The Buryats lived around Lake Baikal since time immemorial. The Buryat nomads freely moved from Lake Baikal to the Khalkha lands and back season by season. At various times they were under the Russian administration or the Mongol rulers' control. Because of porous borders between Mongol local territories, then between the Qing Empire and Russia many Buryats freely moved into neighboring Mongolia. There was a certain dependence of Buryat traditional economy and lifestyle on land resources of the neighboring lands (Urbanaeva, 1995). Today the Buryats are one of the most numerous nations in East Siberia and live in the territory of the Republic of Buryatia one of national subjects of the Russian Federation.

The territory of the Buryats as nomads stretched on various types of landscape, which contains mountains, steppes, rivers, taiga, the most famous site and geographical landmark of the region is Lake Baikal. In the past all these geographical types gave the chance to the Buryats to be involved in different forms of economics and traditionally had rich material and immaterial culture.

Great historical horizon envelops national customs, heritage, tradition, and national mentality in general. The Buryat nomads had always had ethnic ecological traditions as intrinsic part of their so-called "steppe culture". Moving from one land to another the Buryat nomads lived in nature identifying them selves as a part of it. Historically the vast territory of Central Asia seemed endless and it produced great impact on the mentality of the nomads and their abilities to analyze themselves as part of the Universe. The nomadic way of living required detailed knowledge of a territory, and flora and fauna of the locality. This type of life presupposed a small number of migrating tribes and the population of the nomads was low. Travelling from one location to another, the Buryat nomads historically learnt to save the land and protect the environment from overuse. The rituals were performed in order to ask permission before hunting, prove respect and express admiration and gratitude for local Gods of mountains, rivers, and forest. The ways of co-existing were reflected in their beliefs so that they found themselves part of natural ecosystems and wilderness. From the times immemorial the Buryats tactfully treated nature and environment, which was sacred and required respect. This attitude is superimposed not only on the immediate environment, but also on the entire worldview.

As we know, the Buryats have many sacred places treated with reverence since they were related to various deities. They live in these lands while a certain world order of established concepts expressed through a particular tradition exists. Over time, this tactful attitude to sacred places is preserved. Because of a dialogue with nature in the past the Buryat nomads as well as other indigenous peoples on the planet presented best lifestyle based on co-existence with environment. The traditional dialogue includes ethnic nature conservation technologies with relatively small impacts on environment. Ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryats are congenial to environmental ethics. There are no signs of such principal destabilizing factors of development as overconsumption and overpopulation. These cultural

traditions are associated with the protection of nature and maintaining of an optimal level of consumption.

In the 18th – 20th centuries an interaction between Russian and Buryat cultures was obvious in the field of agriculture, cattle-breeding, house architecture, family relations, and folklore. There were the results of the Buryat-Mongol and Russian adjustment to each other and interbreeding of population. This altered the environmental and economic situation. The Buryat nomads got under the influence of Russian traditions. People of agrarian culture and then Buryats changed their lifestyle and became settled. Nevertheless, ethnic and ecological traditions remained alive and were used in the upbringing and education. Russian newcomers, first Cossacks, and then representatives of the Russian Old Believers moved to Siberia because of repressions. Russian migrants brought in a great variety of practical knowledge including their own ethnic ecological traditions.

Hermeneutics of ethnic and aesthetic heritage

Nowadays, as we come back to our historical traditions we should analyze nomadic lifestyle in order to restore effective patterns of dialogue with nature. The horizon of anticipation in hermeneutics gives the opportunity to go beyond our false prejudices and subjective viewpoints and look at the beauty of nature from a different point of view, such as ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryat nomads. Cultural traditions of indigenous people all over the world can be valuable resources for ecologically minded attitude towards nature. Writing about hermeneutics of American nature, R. Mugerauer underlines the advantages of Native American traditions in development lands: “With the recovery of the tradition of non-self-willful attitudes to the landscape, new possible meanings may emerge in the fusion of Native American and ecological thinking” (Mugerauer, 1995).

Heritage and historical traditions envelop ethnic and ecological views on the conservation of natural resources and the very place where many generations of ancestors lived and conserved land, water and woods for their children. Nowadays, restoration of historical consciousness is based on a combination of ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryats, Russian Old Believers and other ethnic groups and nationalities of the Baikal region.

H.-G. Gadamer presents a theory of hermeneutic experience where a person involved in communication has hermeneutic consciousness and tries to analyze false and true prejudices. As Gadamer puts it, “Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 276-277). True prejudices can be referred to ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryat nomads and the rules of “steppe civilization”.

According to the theory the hermeneutic circle leads the explanation of the spiral movement of understanding, which goes from the parts to the whole dialogue with nature and then again to another level. In our case modern young generation can go through the circular movement of understanding environment in the Baikal region, going from one level of historical tradition’s interpretation to another.

The expectation of understanding is called the fore-conception of completeness in *Truth and Method* and it helps run from participation to knowledge. In Gadamer’s words, “The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning” (Gadamer 1999, p. 292). This common meaning can be reached by the attempts to talk to the surrounding nature. Local environment can reflect information about nomads traveling in search for forage for sheep

and cattle, medicinal trees and herbs, mountains and rivers, as well as preserve the ideas of ancient rituals and the tribes' legends.

One of the most prominent and effective forms of hermeneutic dialogue with nature is aesthetic reflection of environment and manifestation of the perception results in folklore and art.

Real events presented in legends of the Buryats are necessarily interpreted from a fantasy point of view. The foundation of imaginative interpretation in dialogue with environment is formed from various relationships between people and nature, various birds and animals, trees and plants. Miraculous and fantastic properties of legends define its structure. Both, the artistic form and the content demonstrate a conversation between humans and the surrounding world.

In the epic poem *Geser*, the great masterpiece of folklore and the epic monument of the Buryat-Mongolian nomads, there is a leitmotif of man and nature unity. The artistic picture contains natural objects such as Cosmos, Earth, Water, Mountains, and Woods. There are descriptions of the World Rock, the World Tree and the cults of Fire, the Sun, the Moon, Stars, Caves, and Rivers. Hermeneutic requirement for understanding is to realize a complete involvement into a common subject matter: the imperative of harmonic co-existence of all creatures, society and nature. When we go into a dialogue with nature in *Geser* epic poem we should have a hermeneutic consciousness and participate in creation of meaning to achieve *commonality*. After Gadamer we name this phenomenon the *fusion of horizons* in hermeneutic conversation with environment. Fusion of horizons is achieved when the reader with hermeneutic consciousness begins to understand the natural lifestyle of ancient Buryats and their direct connection with wilderness.

Although national Buryat literature follows the tendency to synthesize the European and Asian cultural traditions, many writers have the intention to address natural environment of their motherland. Some poets write in Russian, still having national mentality and expressing the will to admire beauty of their birthplace. Writers represent national culture based on new consciousness and very often create in the context of ethnic and ecological mentality.

Among them, first of all, are N. Nimbuev and B. Dugarov. They declare the natural world their space opposing it to the world of other ties and relationships. The theme of nostalgia for the beauty of wildlife and traditional ethnic components traditionally emerges in the Buryat literature. The former symbols of ethnic and natural world, such as the mountains, a yurt as a house of nomads, the blue sky, the steppe, wonderful and graceful horses, steppe grass and flowers become objects of aesthetic reflection in the hermeneutic dialogue with the nature. These metaphors become symbols of nature and national traditions. They are the means of escaping from the urban environment into the world of beautiful nature, which can be considered a macrocosm model: the land – the sky, the yurt – the Cosmos, the sun – the hearth, the moon – the stars (Nimbuev, 2003).

According to B. Dugarov's vision, in his dialogue with nature he encloses ethnic and ecological traditions: "a symbolic image of a lark as a bird of kindness and harmony with the entire Universe could be born only with the people, who roamed the steppe plains from the times immemorial and closely connected with the environment. Thus, the lark's warbles seem to penetrate all spiritual universe of a nomad from ancestors to successors and from a myth to a folk song" (Dugarov, 1999, p. 28). There we can see the poet's hermeneutic experience coined in poetic words, words with additional special connotations, figures and tropes of speech. The poet communicating with nature should be prepared to listen to the historical ecological tradition himself with great care and interest. Direct answers and questions to the tradition and to himself make the movement of the conversation possible. The poet's intentionality of communicating with nature means his desire to speak with

nature, follow the logic of questioning and answering and develop the process, creating a genuine hermeneutic dialogue.

Very often Lake Baikal becomes the object of artistic admiration and description. Creative persons such as poets, writers, painters and composers near Lake Baikal are presented as a type of the national world picture. Many writers call Lake Baikal a sacred lake, magnificent and unique diamond of Buryatia, a pearl of Russia and the whole planet. Lake Baikal is interpreted and imaginatively reflected in legends, fairy-tales, poems, novels, and short-stories. Fantastic beauty of Lake Baikal has always been the subject matter of creative activity. We can observe aesthetic dialogue with nature and Lake Baikal in the works of D. Batozhabai, D. Ulzhytuev, M. Zhigzhitov, D. Zhalsaraev, N. Damdinov, K. Balkov and many others (Boldonova, 2013). One great horizon is a single historical horizon that envelops heritage and tradition. Thus writers place themselves in a position when they can evaluate how ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryat nomads are reflected in literary texts. The concept of horizon gives the opportunity to go beyond their false prejudices and the subjectivity to look at the recent situation from another angle of view. The aesthetic dialogue with nature in the hermeneutic mode will help enhance the role of literature, impact of picturesque images of wild environment, sacred Lake Baikal and other sites of nature in ecological education of their readers.

Artistic reflection upon aesthetic comprehension of the image of Lake Baikal in the folklore and literature is a true example of a hermeneutical dialogue with nature. Understanding nature makes the core of national character formation. Nature as a concept formulates national imaginative consciousness (Baldanov, 2006). That is why the relationship of man and nature is a popular theme in the Buryat literature.

The shared meaning is applied to the present situation. Thus, another concept from Gadamer's hermeneutics can function in the study of hermeneutical dialogue in aesthetics of nature. It is *application* (Gadamer, 1999). Application is a result of understanding. Classical hermeneutic actions, such as interpretation, understanding and application bridge awareness of ecological crisis, limits of economic growth, preservation biosphere balance and environmental consciousness formation to understanding of sustainable development.

The meaning of what is understood in aesthetic dialogue with nature is applied in practice. Interpretation is the result of nature's message. Understanding is the achievement of interpretation of ethnic and ecological traditions. Application in environmental ethics is the goal and practical result of understanding nature.

The ability to admire nature as a reflection of a poet's aesthetic feelings helps going inside again and again to the very depth of sacred secret meaning and significance of being. Its importance grows if the aesthetic admiration is based on a hermeneutic view of the nation's historical experience, ethnic and ecological traditions. Aesthetics of nature's reflexive potential helps both writers and readers in self-realization and connection with moral traditions of the past and the eternal wisdom of previous generations.

Hermeneutic aesthetic dialogue with nature based on ethnic and ecological traditions in the Baikal region is a part of a future environmental paradigm, in the center of which there will be a new person with noosphere consciousness. Transformation of mentality and the way of thinking is the most important task for the 21st century (Mantatov, 2013).

CONCLUSION

It can be recognized that dialogue with nature develops from the attitude towards the environment as natural object to the new level of comprehension, where nature is considered as a living form of being. In evolution process the dialogue has acquired the

variant *culture – nature* and to some extent we can suppose participation of the third component of this conversation presented in the following counterparts: *culture – human's biology – nature*. Then the focus on the side of man's perception allows the scholars studying visual abilities and their role in recovery. A variant of the dialogue *human eye – environment* gives some more ideas for understanding of our interactions with the surrounding world.

The analyzed variants of aesthetic dialogue, for instance *aesthetic perception – nature*, lead to various fields and disciplines from environmental aesthetics to environmental hermeneutics, in the frame of which there was dialogue *reading perception – landscape* and its importance for self-understanding. One of the most hermeneutically prominent variants of a dialogue is the *nomad – nature* variant with its heuristic significance in understanding ethnic and ecological traditions. Methodological foundation of hermeneutics encloses how aesthetic dialogue with nature can enrich our understanding of nature and our interactions with ourselves. It suggests new ways towards ethical implementation of historically developed environmental world outlook of nomads.

The contemporary view upon ethnic and ecological traditions of the Buryat nomads is one of the possible ways to show not only how to preserve historical experience and ethnic heritage, but also learn how to use the acquired knowledge today in the face of environmental problems. Hermeneutic experience suggests the following scheme of the dialogue *aesthetic perception – ethnic and ecological traditions – nature*. Revitalizing traditional nomads' world outlook hermeneutic aesthetics of nature suggests ethical perspectives *aesthetic perception – aesthetic perception (poet, writer, artist) – ethnic and ecological traditions – nature – application*. The hermeneutic category of application emphasizes the importance of possible outcomes in the dialogue with nature, such as implementation of ethical imperatives and moral responsibilities for preserving the beauty of nature.

Civilization and adaptations of human beings allowed them to alter ecosystems on the planet. In addition, cultural transformation and technological innovations allowed the population to grow. Such population growth produces threat to other species on Earth. The development of civilization and human overconsumption bring decline unless it fully utilizes the available resources, such as water, fresh air, soil, food and space. Wildlife is in danger and it requires positive will and the intention to change our way of thinking as well as lifestyle. Nowadays, it is important to return to ethnic and ecological traditions of the nomads using environmental hermeneutics and the rules of genuine conversation with wild nature. The Buryat culture provides interesting material for hermeneutic aesthetic dialogue with nature, using ethnic and ecological traditions of the nation.

Beauty of nature demands comprehension in the art because it is worth questioning as it has a communicative message. Wild nature is a unique ecological and aesthetic system, harmonic unity of animate and inanimate nature and in the context of today's global ecological crisis the concept of natural beauty should be understood hermeneutically, taking into consideration rich historical, cultural and ecological traditions of indigenous peoples. This is a major challenge of our epoch. It is a requirement of the present time for future generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research is financed by Russian Scientific Foundation, grant # 14-18-02006

REFERENCES

- Akindinova, T. (2013) Hermeneutics as a Method of Ecological Aesthetics. *Vestnik of Leningrad state university*, 3, vol.2, (pp. 76-87)
- Alekseev, V. (2002). Priroda i obshe'stvo. Etapy vzaimodeystviya. Nature and Society. The stages of Interrealations. *Ecologiya i zhizn'*, 2. Retrieved February, 24, 2016 from Ecolife database on the World Wide Web <http://www.ecolife.ru/jornal/echo/2002-2-1.shtml>.
- Baldanov, S. (2006). Buryatskaya literatura v sovremennom sociokulturnom processe. In *Buryatskaya literatura v sociokulturnom kontexte*. Buryat literature in contemporary socio-cultural processes. In *Buryat literature in today's socio-cultural context: Proceedings of regional scientific conference (November, 27-28, 2006). Part 1 (pp. 4-8)*. Ulan-Ude: Buryat Unen Publishing House.
- Bell, N.M. (2014) The Varieties of Hermeneutics and Engaging with Social Epistemology. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 2014 Vol. 3, No. 2, 38-39. Retrieved February, 20, 2015 from <http://wp.me/P1Bfg0-Y9> 38
- Boldonova, I. (2013). Chelovek u Baikala: K Probleme esteticheskogo poznaniya prorodnogo ob'ekta. A Man at Baikal: On the issue of aesthetic cognition of a natural object. *Vestnik BSU. Vol.14.* (pp. 207-211).
- Clingerman, F., Treanor, B., Drenthen, M., Utsler, D. (2014). Introduction. *Interpreting nature. The Emerging field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. Edited by Forrest Clingerman, Brian Treanor, Martin Drenthen, and David Utsler. Fordham University Press.
- Drenthen, M. (2011). Reading ourselves through the land: landscape hermeneutics and ethics of place'. In: F. Clingerman & M. Dixon (Eds.): *Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics* (p. 123 – 128). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Dugarov, B. (1999). Struna zemli i neba (obraz zhavoronka v Buryatskoi mifologii i poezii). In *Problemy buryatskoi filologii na sovremennom etape*. String of Earth and Sky (the image of lark in Buryat mythology and poetry). In *Issues of Contemporary Buryat Philology*. Ulan-Ude: Izd-vo Buryat. gosun-ta.
- Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy (2009). J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, Editors in Chief. Gale: *Cengage Learning* (p.313-321).
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1987). *The Relevance of the beautiful and other essays*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1999). *Truth and method*. New-York: Continuum.
- Gumilev, L. (2007). *Etnogenesis i biosfera zemli. Ethnogenesis and Biosphere of Earth*. Moscow: Eksmo.
- Horrell, D. G., Stravakopoulou, F., Hunt, Ch., Southgate, C. (2010) *Ecological hermeneutics: Biblical, historical and theological perspectives*. London: T&T Clark.
- Filyanina, N. (2014) Concepts of Ecological Hermeneutics and its Potential in Overcoming of the Ecological Crisis. In *Young Scientist USA (p. 140)*. Auburn, WA: Lulu Press.
- Frayne, C. (2015) *Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a basis for Ecological Critical Discourse Analysis*. Retrieved January, 10, 2016 from Language and Ecology database on the World Wide Web www.ecoling.net/articles.
- Keller, D. (n.d.) *Ecological hermeneutics*. Retrieved January, 15, 2016 from Philosophy and the environment database on the World Wide Web <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Envi/EnviKell.htm>.

Kuznetsova, O. (2003) *Reading of ecological themes in the context of artistic, cultural and historical activities with the use of hermeneutical logics*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Barnaul.

Loetsch, B. (n.d.) *The Conflict about beauty – Aesthetics between nature and architecture*. Retrieved December, 12, 2015 from Biotope city database on the World Wide Web <http://www.biotope-city.net/article/conflict-about-beauty-aesthetics-between-nature-and-architecture-0>.

Mantatov, V.V. (2013). *Kontseptual'naya revolyutsiya: K voprosu o konferencii OON Rio+20. Conceptual Revolution: To the question of the United Nations conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20*. Ulan-Ude: East-Siberian State University of Technologies and Management Press.

Moiseev, N. (2001). *Universum, infomatsiya, obsh'estvo. Universe, information, society*. Moscow.

Mugerauer, R. (1995). *Interpreting environments. Tradition, deconstruction, hermeneutics*. Texas University press.

Nimbuev, N. (2003). *Strenozhennye molnii. Stikhi. Perevody. Proza. Tied thunderstorms. Verse. Prose*. Moscow: Galereya "Khankhalaev,".

Prigogine, I., Stengers, I. (1984). *Order out of chaos. Man's new dialogue with nature*. London: Heinemann.

Prozersky, V. (2013) From aesthetics of object to aesthetics of environment. *Vestnik of Leningrad state university*, 3 (pp. 88-96).

Rozanov, V. (1895). Chto vyrazhaet soboyu krasota prirody. What does beauty of nature Express. *Russkoe obozrenie*, 10 (pp.601-623), 11 (pp.132 -159), 12 (pp. 639 -670).

Solovyiev, V. (1998). *Krasota v prirode*. Beauty in nature. Moscow: Phenix.

Treanor, B. (2014) *Emplotting Virtue. A Narrative Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics*. Sunny Press.

Urbanaeva, I. (1995). *Man by Lake Baikal and the world of Central Asia*. Ulan-Ude, Buryat Science Center.

Vernadsky, V. (1991). *Nauchnaya mysl kak planetnoe yavlenie. Scientific thought as planetary phenomenon*. Moscow.