

## THE SYMBOLIC IMAGE OF THE YURT IN KAZAKH APPLIED ARTS

*Tatigul SAMURATOVA,*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,  
5 Munaipasov Street, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: samyratovatk@mail.ru*Gulzhanat AKHMETOVA,*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,  
5 Munaipasov Street, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan

## ABSTRACT

*The primary goal of this research is the comprehensive study of scientific and theoretical, historical and pedagogical foundations of the Kazakh yurt, as well as the notions of space and time in Kazakh applied arts. The authors give an overview of philosophical, psychological, ethnographic and cultural works and reveal characteristic features of the yurt and its role in Kazakh culture. They conclude that the Kazakh yurt has a sacred meaning and summarizes the understanding of the spiritual and material culture, aesthetic ideals and people's wisdom, traditions and customs of the past, present and future in the applied arts.*

*Key words: space and time in the applied arts, cognition, yurt, ornamentation, ancient Kazakhstan, totemic mythological character, the world tree, the Great Steppe*

L'IMMAGINE SIMBOLICA DELLA YURTA NELLE ARTI  
APPLICATE KAZAKE

## SINTESI

*L'obiettivo primario della presente ricerca è la ricerca delle basi scientifiche e teoriche, storiche e pedagogiche delle yurte kazake, così come le nozioni di spazio e di tempo nelle arti applicate kazake. Gli autori offrono una panoramica delle opere filosofiche, psicologiche, etnografiche e culturali e rivelano gli elementi caratteristici della yurta e il suo ruolo nella cultura kazaka. Le loro conclusioni sono che la yurta kazaka ha un significato sacro e riassume la comprensione della cultura materiale e spirituale, gli ideali estetici e sapienza, tradizioni e costumi popolari del passato, presente e futuro nell'ambito delle arti applicate.*

*Parole chiave: spazio e tempo nelle arti applicate, cognizione, yurta, decorazione, Kazakhstan antico, personaggio mitologico totemico, l'albero del mondo, la Grande Steppa*

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern period of globalization, a particular attention is paid to the national artistic culture as one of the major ways to present a country to the world and “a perfect means for expressing the pulse of a nation” (Jelinčić, Vukić, 2015). The future of the Republic of Kazakhstan is connected with spiritual wealth and high culture, genuine national consciousness, efficiency and professionalism of descendants.

The research gives a consistent overview of the concepts of space, time and yurt in Kazakh applied arts and determines their educational functions. The study of these sources could provide a more complete and comprehensive understanding of works of art and culture and a deeper analysis of the types of applied arts of the Kazakhs.

One of the problems of Kazakh art is the cognition of the categories of space and time in works of applied arts of the Kazakhs, who are considering time and space in the already transformed state. The analysis of these concepts in the artistic culture is suggested to be conducted on the works of applied arts that are based on the philosophies of nomads.

The traditional applied arts are a legacy of material and spiritual culture of nomads who lived in the Great Steppe. Its development is closely related to the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakh society, its socio-economic status, self-consciousness of the people and the historical process. Nomads did not separate themselves as something alien from nature and the world around them. They viewed themselves as nothing less than a natural cell of the surrounding and a particle of native wildlife (Khazanov, 1984). The nomad's life is implemented through the passage and comprehension of the spatial world, that is the definition of place and spiritual purpose in the world, which is reflected in works of Kazakh applied arts.

Kazakh culture was largely determined by national crafts. Therefore, applied arts are considered to be a second nature of the world of objects drawn up by craftsmen. These are runic signs, stone statues, monuments, sculptures, jewelry, carpet weaving, etc. The applied arts reflect the ancient worldviews of the Kazakhs in the form of yurts and a variety of ornaments and patterns. Folk artisans did not think about the world in common logical terms, but deeply perceived space, time, infinity and motion in their worldview. They revealed the most important qualities of their attitude through applied arts.

The practical significance of this work lies in the fact that, due to the concepts of the role and content of space and time in the applied arts in life, one can significantly increase the level of artistic and cultural development of young people, and improve methods of teaching decorative and applied arts in the regions with developed arts and crafts.

## METHODS

The study is theoretical, carried out in three stages.

The first stage is devoted to studying and comparing philosophical, literary, psychological, educational, ethnographic and cultural works, serving as a theoretical basis for analyzing the artistic categories of space and time in the process of learning the Kazakh

yurt, and as the main measurement technique of space, time, the impersonation of life and the surrounding world.

The second stage gives a consistent overview of the peculiarities of the concepts of space and time in Kazakh applied arts and defines their educational functions.

The third stage provides the description of the yurt, its types, elements and symbols and defines its role in Kazakh culture.

The study used a comparative and historical method. Its use is possible in chronological terms and in terms of attracting the ethnographic data of applied arts of other peoples, including Kazakhs. The method of the comparative study also contributed to a consistent research.

### THE CONCEPT AND PERCEPTION OF SPACE AND TIME

The notion of space and time has the following definitions in philosophical, historical, ethnographic and pedagogical researches and dictionaries:

- a) Space and time are universal forms of the existence of matter, the coordination of objects (Spirkin, 1993): space "... is a form of the existence of material objects and processes (characterizing the extent and structure of material systems). Time is a form of the subsequent change of phenomena and states of matter (characterizing the duration of their existence). Space and time have an objective character, inseparable from matter, and are inseparably associated with its motion and with each other ..." (Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1985, 1083).
- b) Space and time are philosophical categories, which indicate forms of the existence of things and phenomena. They reflect both their coexistence (in space), on the one hand, and their interchanging (in time), and the duration of their existence on the other. Time and space are a supporting structure of any explanatory worldview known hitherto (Gritsanov, 2003, 804).
- c) Space is a symbolic feature of the perspective, and time is a vectoral system (Medoyev, 1979, 67).

Thus, space and time are philosophical categories, universal forms of the existence of matter and the duration of existence.

Space and time are studied in terms of philosophy, historical ethnography, folklore, ethnic culture and art, including:

- the meaning and national spiritual and cultural significance of space and time were deeply studied in the works of such philosophers as Aytaly (2000), Gabitov (2006);
- in ethnography, folklore and literature, Kodar (2002), Ibrayev (1993) explored the worldview of nomads, and Kazykhanova (1977), Seydimbek (1977), Bayzhigitov (1994) drew attention to the aesthetic nature of art;
- art critics Basenov (1958), Mukanov (1979), Zhanibekov (1965), Margulan (1966), Tazhimuratov (1977), Kasimanov (1995), Arginbayev (1987), Ibrayeva (1994), Urazbekova, Lee (1980) introduced the meanings of space and time in Kazakh applied arts.

Foreign researchers examined various problems of space and time (Hegel, Newton, Einstein, Lobachevsky). According to Hegel (1975), motion is the unity of space and

time. In subjective idealist philosophy, space and time are considered as subjective forms of ordering of people's sensations. This view was held by Berkeley, Hume, Mach, Av-enarius and others.

According to objective idealists, space and time, existing objectively, are derived from the universal reason, absolute idealism, etc. These are the views of Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, neothomists and some other philosophers.

In the history of philosophy (Democritus, Epicurus, Newton), space and time are considered as independent bases, co-existing with matter and regardless of it.

Kazakh scientists Serikkaliuly (1994), Seydimbek (2001), Kodar (2002), Ibrayev (1993) give their own definitions of the concepts of space and time. According to literary critic Serikkaliuly (1994), space is “the infinity that people feel with their soul, once seen its beauty. Time is the eternal existence, the past, present and future ...”. The scientist supposes that the concept of infinity is interconnected with meditation. For example, space is a blue lake or a green jailow (a high mountain pasture). Here the infinity of space and time are interrelated. Man thus feels freedom through his imagination of the reality of life.

Scientist Kodar (2002) proves that “space we see, time we feel. Man immediately perceives what he sees, but what is heard can be perceived only some time later”, i.e. the settled choose plastic arts (architecture, sculpture, drawing), while the nomads choose spiritual arts: music and poetry.

According to folklorist Ibrayev (1993), the concept of space is “a historical and philosophical category. However, it is subordinate to the poetic laws of epos. Therefore, its representation depends on the nature of the thematic time”. The scientist studies the questions of epic space in two aspects in his work: the epic concept of space and its artistic peculiarity. The concept of space (names of the area, mountains, rivers, lakes, etc.) is a historical category, although it is also subordinate to the poetic laws of epos. First of all, it is event-related, that is why its representation depends on the nature of the thematic time.

An expert in Turkish studies Klyashtorny (1981) proves that “time is the fate, the eternity, and space is a wide open land”. The scientist showed the specificity of space and time in his research and suggested that the creation of the World was understood as “the beginning of time and space”, and was treated as “an endless cycle of beginnings ...”

The symbol of infinity is a tree. This is the structure-forming beginning of the Turkic worldview. This image contributes to the connection of all spheres of life vertically. Tree serves both as the axis of the world, and as its center. This is the starting point of the coordinate system, both temporal and spatial. According to the Xiongnu, tree, especially a high one, was considered a connecting link with the main god Tengri, who lived in Heaven (Samuratova et al., 2015). The world tree represents the unity of the whole world, being a peculiar model of the universe and man, where every object, creature or phenomenon has its own place. This symbol was reflected in the applied arts of the Kazakhs. This image can be drawn, carved in a stone or a tree (Nurlanova, 1993).

Ethnographer Zhanibekov (1965) provides some examples of ancestors' life, their worldview and lifestyle, and shows how people's imagination is reflected in space and time in a yurt. Renowned scientist Kasimanov (1995) proves that space and time, depicted in an ornament, were inherited as a symbolic value. Space and time are expressed in color,

interval, distances, times of the year and seasons. For example, the ancient Turks, tengrists, perceived light blue and yellow colors as a unity of heaven and earth. On the national flag of the Republic of Kazakhstan, this unity embodies the infinity of the sky over the whole earth and people, as well as a symbol of overall well-being, tranquility, peace and unity.

The perception of space, motion and time is based on the visual (space and motion) and auditory (time) factors. While perceiving space, the distance between objects and their remoteness from the observer is estimated, as well as the depth, volume (three-dimensionality) of objects, and the direction of their allocation, which allows the observer not only to perceive space, but also to orient oneself in it. For example, the living space in the Kazakh yurt is divided into four parts. The place in front of the yurt (“*tor*”) is the most honorable. Guests and older men of the family have their sit here. Here, on the chests, there are a pile of blankets, carpets and fur clothes which represent the prosperity of the family. Females place themselves to the right of the exit where products and utensils are stored, and males – to the left, where stock-raising, horse and hunting gear are hung.

Sacred symbols and bright cheerful colors are some kind of an invitation for an always-welcome guest. The interior of the yurt is rich in color. Furniture and carpentry are painted in orange or red and ornamented, and each of these ornaments is a good wish.

According to literary critic Serikkaliuly (1994), in the process of the artistic cognition “space and time are perceived in general as a unique view of reality with the help of observing and understanding the world around”. The artistic cognition has a certain peculiarity, the essence of which is in the holistic reflection of the world and especially of man in it. The infinity is a world of wonders, a sign of the uncertainty, and its measure is an orientation. It covers all the existing things, things already perceived by man and things that will be perceived in the future. The orientations for nomads were such stars and constellations as the Big Dipper (*жетикарақшы*), the Pleiads (*уркер*), and the Polar Star (*темирқазық*). With the help of these stars, they estimated the distance and direction of the path at night, and forecast weather.

According to Omarova, Alpeissova and Kuseubay (2015), “in the system of traditional culture of nomadic peoples, the leading medium was taken by spatial and temporary types of the art, in particular, poetry and music”. In art, time and space are divided into reality, conceptuality and perceptuality (Zobov, Mostepanenko, 1974). These categories are based on mythological space and time. For example, the trinity of mythological characters, Tengri, Umai Ana and the Wolf, reflects the integrity of the world and the earth. Conceptual space and time are the nature and celestial bodies, i.e. the concept of the outside world (for example, chronology and a lunar calendar). Perceptual space and time are perception, cognition and imagination.

Scientists identified the specificity of the concept of space and time. Cultural studies specialist Seydimbek (1997) expressing “the historical development of the national worldview” proved with specific examples that the reification of the surrounding world is also determined by means of space and time. Firstly, the mythical changes are related to the concepts and images that are associated with the creation of the world. In this regard, there were used such expressions as “in the year dot”, “long time ago”, “in old times”, “in the distant past”, “in ancient times”, and so on. Secondly, the correlation of real time and

real space is directly connected with the life of the nomadic Kazakhs and fully reflects their experience gained over the centuries.

Thus, philosophers considered the spiritual and cultural meaning and significance of space and time; historians analyzed space and time in nomadic arts; philologists studied the nomads' worldview and drew attention to the aesthetic nature of art; art critics introduced the semantic meaning of space and time in Kazakh applied arts.

From our analysis of the philosophical, literary, psychological, ethnographic and cultural works, we can draw the following conclusions:

- 1) Space and time are not only basic forms of the existence of matter, but also the perception of the world, wise reasoning, and emotional feeling.
- 2) Space and time are interrelated with the worldview and national unity of the concept of self-consciousness, intelligence, feeling, and human mysteries.
- 3) The concept of space and time is reflected in the traditional applied arts.

#### YURT AS A SYMBOL OF THE HEARTH OF THE NOMADS

For nomads the yurt embodied the unity of man and nature. Margulan (1966) defined the yurt as “one of the oldest types of portable dwellings, adapted to the nomadic way of



*Fig. 1: The Kazakh felt yurt (Wikimedia Commons)*

life”. According to him, it was widespread among the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppes, and it retained its ancient form to the present day.

The Kazakh yurt is not only part of the material culture of the Kazakhs, but it also has a sacred meaning and contains symbols, which embody the most diverse information about their religious and mythological worldview. Yurt is a symbol of the unity of the cosmos and the universe, space and time. It is the foundation of Kazakh national culture, which gives rise to all kinds of applied arts.

### **Types of yurts based on structure and appearance**

Yurts, based on structure and appearance, are divided into two types: *kazaky ui* (the Kazakh yurt) and *kalmaky ui* (the Kalmyk yurt). The difference between them is the matter of principles. The Kazakh yurt is more spacious and high, and it is dome-shaped. The Kalmyk yurt has a cone shape.

In practical use, as appropriate, there are three types of yurts: dwelling, holiday or guest and camping (travel) yurts. These basic types of yurts, depending on specific needs, have a number of different options. For example, the size of the dwelling yurt starting with only three wings reached twelve, eighteen or even thirty wings. Based on the number of wings – sections of the yurt latticework – dwellings were called “three-winged” or “five-winged”. In some cases, there were used such special terms as *kara ui* – a three-winged yurt (house) (lit.: black, i.e. a simple house); *konyr ui* – a four-winged yurt (lit.: brown, i.e. not so black house); *boz ui* – a five-winged yurt (lit.: a grey house); *ak ui* – a six-winged yurt (lit.: a white house); *ak*; *ala orda* (lit.: a whitish horde, i.e. Khan’s headquarters); *ak orda* (lit.: a white horde); *akshankai* (dazzling white, white) – an eight-winged yurt; *altyn orda* (a golden horde) – a twelve-winged yurt; *altyn uzik* (golden blankets (canvas) covering the outside of the yurt) – a thirty-winged yurt. Kazakhs, knowing a lot about yurts, could determine the number of its wings, according to the number of upper endings of *kerege*, converging on *shanyrak*.

The holiday or guest yurt had usually no less than six or eight wings. In its external and internal decoration and manufacturing, it was distinguished by its elegance and luxury. Everything had its exact purpose and place. Academician Margulan (1966) provided Christopher Bardanes’s description of the yurt. His visit to the yurt of Sultan Mamet of the Middle zhuz was so exciting that he could compare it to a visit to a magnificent museum. The right side of the yurt was comparted by a silk curtain. There were elaborate inlaid bone and precious metal chests against the walls, where light tight leather pouches resembling suitcases were placed. There were painted carpets and walkways and fluffy carpets on the ground. In the center, there was a vast cauldron with beautiful lettering. The host and hostess, sitting on the soft duvets, seemed happy to own this precious museum of art.

Apart from the main dwelling yurts and ceremonial constructions there were other types of demountable buildings, characterized by simplicity of the design and interior decoration like, for example, military camping yurts. Larger ones were called *ablaysha*, and the smallest, made up of three gratings, short dome laths (*uuk*) and the miniature up-



Fig. 2: The Expedition 38/39 backup crew members participate in a traditional meal in a Kazakh “yurt” or tent Oct. 27 during a tour of Baikonur, Kazakhstan (Wikimedia Commons)

per circular opening (*shanyrak*) were called *zholyim-ui*. Special yurts were also allocated to kitchens and storages.

All the constructions and elements of the yurt have Kazakh names of the human body. For example, *yydih syyegi* (bone – a yurt’s framework), *mandaisha* (forehead – an upper part of the doorjamb).

In addition to the sacred and symbolic meaning, the yurt has a worldly character. Typically, the number of roof trusses is 60, i.e. it equals the number of years of a full cycle of the lunar calendar. Beginning with the north in the direction of the sun, the dome is divided into 12 sections. People determined the time of the day by the one on which the sunlight felt from an upper opening of the yurt. Consequently, the yurt helped to tell the time, i.e. it served both as a calendar and a clock (Mauvieux, Reinberg & Toutou, 2014).

### The constituent elements of the yurt

The spatial model of the world is revealed through the basic cosmogenic objects correlated with its center. The vertical structure of the world which suggests “a presence of a middle, a top and a bottom, is most fully visualized in an image of a world tree (world mountain), with different zones of which are correlated various classes of the phenomena,



both natural, and social. The top is a crown of the tree, the sky, stars, a top of a mountain, a source of the river, a bird, the upper world. The bottom is the roots of a tree, a cave, gorge, water, the animals living in burrows, and the horned animals, the lower world. The middle is a tree trunk, a valley, mankind, animals with “warm breath”. According to Bezertinov (2000), the assimilated space is hierarchically organized in concentric circles around the center of the world, symbolized by a stone or a pillar, but more often – a world tree, indicating the world axis that connects the earth and the sky.

This motif is also found in Kazakh applied arts. An analogue of the world tree in the yurt is a fire, located in the middle. *Shanyrak* of the yurt was correlated with the firmament. It was a boundary between the outer and the inner space. Through *shanyrak*, the dwellers of the yurt were associated with sacred celestial bodies: the sun, the moon and the stars. In the first months after the wedding, the bride had to get up with the rising sun and slightly lift the felt blanket (*tyndik*) over *shanyrak*. It carried a profound symbolical essence. *Shanyrak* was a family heirloom, a symbol of procreation. It was handed down from generation to generation. *Shanyrak*'s outline – a cross in a circle – is a symbol of perpetual motion of the sun, a symbol of evolution. To raise the *shanyrak*, i.e. to set up



Fig. 3: *Shanyrak* (uploaded by Дамиля, GFDL 1.2+ <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/ru/a/a5/%D0%A8%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BA.JPG>)

a yurt, the most respected and revered elderly person in the aul was usually invited. The yurt itself also had a sacred meaning. It symbolized the unity of the cosmos and the universe, the assimilated space. Therefore, for ancient nomads the yurt represented the unity of man and nature. Man made a yurt in his own image.

When considering the constituent elements of the yurt, we should specify its four main parts.

The first part, the framework of the yurt, its foundation, is made of wood – birch, wild cherry, willow, poplar and pine. The framework of the yurt consists of the following components: expanding latticework – *kerege*, dome poles – *uyk*, a circular top of the dome – *shanyrak*, doors – *sykyrlauyk*, the top crossbeam of a jamb – *mandaisha*, a threshold – *tabyldyryk*, lateral racks – *ergenek* or *bosaga* covered with fine carving, paintings, and inlaid bone.

The second part – felt and felt products made from sheep's wool of autumn shearing; *tuylryk* – felt covering the *kerege* (a lattice frame of the yurt, or rather, the sidewalls); *uyk* – felt put between *tuylryk* and *tunduk*. *Kiiz yesik* – a felt door, *uyk kap* – a felt cover of the *uyk* – poles of a wooden frame of the yurt, *dedege* – a patterned ribbon made from the felt encircling the yurt on the edge of the *uyk* for decoration. *Tundyk*, also made from the felt and having a zenith hole, serves as a window. As described by Margulan (1966), through *tundyk* the smoke comes out from the open hearth. In bad weather, it is closed with a quadrangular piece of felt, fringed with the cord at the edges. Elderly men, looking at it, prayed, referring to the sky and luminaries.

The third part – ribbons, cords and ropes (arkan), made from sheep or camel's wool, horsehair: *bas bau* – the largest and sturdiest rope or *arkan* in the form of a thick ribbon (i.e. a flat rope), which ties up the lattice frame of the yurt, *ayak*, from above; *bau* – the rope which ties up the lower part of the yurt; *uzik bau* – the rope which ties the *uniny* to a wooden frame of the yurt; *tunlik bau* – the rope which fastens the felt pieces on top of the yurt; *kur* – a woolen ribbon, used for bonding the joints of the *kerege*; *terme* – a ribbon or a rope with colorful ornaments, patterns; *baskur* – a colorful long belt, a patterned ribbon which ties up the latticework of the *kerege*; *zhelbau* – ropes which hold the yurt in a strong wind, storm, and so on.

The fourth part – mats, tents, and covers made from marram-grass or cheegrass: *shym shi* – a patterned mat from cheegrass; *orauly shi* – a rolling mat; *kilem shi* – a carpet mat, *alasha shi* – a stripe mat, *ak shi* – a white mat. Wicker mats were used for a variety of purposes. The following is an incomplete list of products made from them: *as shi* – an underlain mat for food (for drying sour cheese, cottage cheese, and so on); *ayak kap* – a netted bag for dishes, kitchen utensils; *au* – nets; *nevod, yesik* – a two-leaved door; *kiiz basatyn shi* – a mat with the help of which the felt pieces are made; *kuzeuish* – mats used for shearing; *kazan zhapyksh* – a mat which closes the cauldron; *kar ustagysh* – a mat used for covering from the snow; *mal soyatyn shi* – mats used for butchering; *masakana* – mats used as curtains from mosquitoes and gnats; *saba tosenish* – a mat for wineskin; *sakar shi* – a mat used for soapmaking; *tereze zhapyksh* – shutters made from reed, cheegrass; *shi kora* – a paddock, a fence from cheegrass mats for livestock; *shi kalpak* – a wicker cheegrass cap, a hat, or a mat used for drying *qurt*.

Scientist and educator Valikhanov described the yurt in such a way: “After an exhausting hot day, it was particularly pleasant to lie in the yurt in the cool evening and to have a rest, lifting the felt around the yurt for a free flow of air” (Suleymenov, Moiseyev, 1985). The renowned Chinese poet Bai Juyi (VI–VII centuries) enthusiastically glorified the merits of the Turkish yurt. Ruzbikhan wrote, “Kazakhs quite skillfully made very durable and strong arrows and ottomans with ornaments and produced colored felt pieces with extraordinary patterns and cut straps, very beautiful and graceful” (Seydimbek, 2001).

#### YURT – ART MUSEUM OF THE KAZAKH PEOPLE

The yurt is a living space of Kazakh ancestors, which repeats the structure of the universe and is associated with it. Yurt shows works of applied art and summarizes the understanding of the spiritual and material culture, aesthetic ideals and wisdom of people, the images of the traditions and customs of the past, present and future in applied arts.

The yurt for nomads was more than just a dwelling. It symbolized the world in which they lived, and was a sacred image of life under heaven, as evidenced by such combinations of words in the Kazakh language as *ui bolu* – to start a family (lit.: to be or to become home), *shanyrakty syilau* – to treat your home and household faithfully and respectfully (lit.: to respect *shanyrak*) and other similar phrases.

The yurt for them was a part of the world. Its top is the heavenly dome and the edge of the circle – the horizon. Assembling and taking down the yurt, the nomads tilted it in the



Fig. 4: Inside a Kazakh traditional yurt from Kazakhstan, in Paris (France), an event about Kazakh culture made by Kazakhstan government, in November 2014 (Wikimedia Commons)

direction of the camping ground because they believed that it would help them to have an easy way. The following word combinations in the Kazakh language confirm that the yurt for the steppe people, in many cases, was the personification of life and the world around: *zhurt bolmaisyn* – if you don't start a family, you will not find happiness in life (lit.: you will not make a mark); *tutin tutetu* – to start a family, to set up house, household (lit.: to build a fire), *shanyrak biik bolsyn*, *kerege berik bolsyn* – good wishes for newlyweds or family members (lit.: may the *shanyrak* be high, and the *kerege* be strong), *oshagynny otyndirime* – may there always be harmony between generations, and life in your home (lit.: not let the fire die out in the hearth).

No wonder, the names of states, towns or places of staying of the nomadic tribes sometimes coincided with the names of individual components of the yurt. For example, Valikhanov wrote, “The Golden Horde is the Golden tent and yurt, where the khan sat; later it turned into the name of the city headquarters, where the khans lived. Therefore, the words *ak*; *horde*, *kok horde*, *sary horde* should be taken not as the name of the *ulus*, or yurt, but as the name of the main place of staying and residence of the khans” (Suleymenov, Moiseyev, 1985).

In terms of the aesthetic impact of the yurt, its appearance should be mentioned first: numerous white domes on the emerald green grass – a heavenly city, sprung into existence, like the city in the desert.

In this respect, one should emphasize the coherence of the traditional dwelling of the Kazakhs with the environment, and the space. In the nomads' mind, a felt yurt was a part of nature and the universe (Faegre, 1979). It has four sides – east, west, south, and north. The entrance to the yurt should be placed on the eastern side. In earlier times, the owner of the yurt, leaving early in the morning, the first thing looked at dawn and greeted the rising sun. This continuing custom and tradition to set up felt houses in such a way proves that the yurt is recognized and still associated with the small world beyond the large world and obeys the laws of life, set in the universe (Mukanov, 1981). The large world in traditional views of the nomads consists of seven underground and seven aboveground spheres. The ground world is between them. In other words, the large world consists of three components: aboveground, ground and underground. A felt yurt is also divided into three parts: base, walls and *shanyrak*. *Shanyrak* is the main part and the most sacred place in the yurt, which is revered as a supreme being, equivalent to the heavens. In the history of the nomadic peoples, *shanyrak*, handed down from headmen, military leaders or orators to their sons (by custom, to the youngest son – *kenzhe*), had to become the most respected house, and the owner of this house enjoyed special respect.

Considering *shanyrak* as a reflection of cosmic symbols, it is important to mention about the *kanat* (rope) which is tied to the *shanyrak* – *zhelbau*. Hanging from the *shanyrak*, as if flowing out, *zhelbau*, gracefully intertwined with beautiful tassels, performed a specific sacral function that is traditionally established and has been continuing to this day. *Zhelbau* is a link connecting a felt yurt, as the small world, with the large world – the cosmos. Therefore, masters, making *zhelbau*, intertwined wavy symbols, representing water, with quadrangular symbols-patterns, representing the four cardinal

directions. In the nomadic world, there were no redundant, unnecessary signs, which did not indicate the vital importance. All unnecessary things, which had no practical use, were discarded, and there was no place for empty meaningless symbols. In this sense, *zhelbau* along with its ancient sacral function of the connecting link served as the solid support in windy or stormy weather, holding a felt yurt, without letting it sway, roll or lean to its side. The name of *zhelbau* is also connected with the performance of this practical function.

As far as the felt yurt repeated in miniature the large world in its three large parts (seven underground spheres, seven heavenly spheres and the earth's surface), sacred meaning was inherent to not only *shanyrak*, but also the middle part and the threshold. For example, cattle intended for sacrificial slaughter, was tied to *beldeu* – the rope encircling the yurt. It was not allowed to tread on the threshold. These and other traditionally established rules of the ancient times are preserved to this day; they are connected with the ancient world of the nomads. European ambassadors, who arrived in the khan's headquarters, were at an extremely high risk: they could accidentally tread on the threshold or touch it. If this happened, all became clear as day that this person was an attacker who conspired against the Khan. Therefore, the “villain” was instantly eliminated. According to historical facts since the Turkic khanate and the Kazakh later khanates, the informants or messengers had the following order of bringing bad news: the one who brought dead news had to tread on the threshold with his right foot, putting his both hands tight against the doorjamb. So far, there are the following expressions among the Kazakhs: “Do not tread on the threshold!”, “Do not lean against the doorjamb!” This is a kind of taboo, which has a long-standing meaning.

Since the felt yurt was the small world for the nomads, it performed astronomical functions in the framework of a patriarchal worldview. The most common felt yurt among nomads was a six-winged yurt, which embodied the typological features most of all. Each wing of this six-winged yurt had precisely 12 longitudinal and transverse supports, which symbolized the number of months in a year. Moreover, there were exactly 108 *kerege* from the base to the top of each wing. According to astronomical concepts of the eastern nations, since ancient times the number 108 has been the number which had the value of measurement. The Eastern peoples signified celestial bodies with pentagons. For example, the White Huns (420–562) placed a pentagonal sign on their flag where a pentagon was a sign of the star and the mean angles of this pentagon in the measurement were 108 degrees. In Japan, China and Tibet, Buddhist temples *bell 108 times* on the New Year's Eve. Each ring represents one of “108 earthly temptations a Buddhist must overcome to achieve nirvana” (Taganov, Saari, 2014).

The felt house was an instrument of the measurement of space and time for the nomadic Kazakhs. Thus, the nomads have formulas defining the time of the day: *tankar-angysy*, *ala kobe*, *kulan iek*, *ala keuim*, *tanrauandau*, *kun shyga*, *kun tusau boiy koterile*, *kun irgeden kuterile*, *kun iykka shyga*, *kun tas tobege shyga*, *kun aua* or *kun bata*. These formulas measure the time of the household activity, and the vital flow from dawn to dusk. People, determining the time of the day, constantly refer to such words as *irge* (base), *tayak* (pole), *arkan* (kanat, rope), *iyk* (shoulder), *tobe* (top), *zhambas* (thigh) etc.

These words are also the names of the concepts related to the parts of the felt yurt. These formulas precisely determine upon which side of the yurt a beam of sunshine falls and illuminates it at the given time.

The following phrases, directly related to the household activity of the nomads, prove that the nomads needed to determine and differentiate time: *sut pisirim* (time of boiling milk), *bie sauym* (time of milking mares), *et asym* (time of preparing meat), etc. This cycle of household work took place in a certain sequence and in a continuous rhythm. Each activity had its time period, an interval, fixed in the temporal mode of the felt yurt, and was really a cycle (Seydimbek, 1997). For example, yurts, convenient for roaming from place to place, usually had 45, 60, 76, 90, 10 *uninas*. They are used in three-winged, five-winged, six-winged, and eight-winged yurts. According to the location and movement of sunlight across the *uninas*, one can determine the time within the accuracy from 1 to 5 minutes. When the number of *uninas* in the yurt was 90, then dividing 360 by 90, it was possible to learn that the distance between *uninas* was 4 minutes. Similarly, when the number of *uninas* was 72, then dividing 360 degrees by 72, we obtained 5 minutes – the interim distance between *uninas*. If to render this measurement into the nomads' language, one can say, "The sun has passed two *uninas* – it's time to boil milk; the sun passes seven or eight *unina* – hence, the time of milking cows has passed" (Seydimbek, 2001).

Not only *shanyrak* and its component parts are used for measuring time. Due to a certain order, all things in the felt yurt are the links of time determining. For example, the door always opens to the east. On the right side of the entrance, there is an underlying mat with the dishes on it, and on the left side, there are weapons and horse harnesses. There is a compartment for other utensils closer to the center: everything has its own place. In the center of the yurt, a little away from the door, there is the hearth. This tradition copies the constellations of the zodiac in the "large house". Thus, the inhabitants of the felt house, going to bed, lay down with their heads placed north-westward – toward the North Star. M. Utemisov in his song-poem "*Temir Kazyk Zhastanbai*" reminds specifically about this tradition. The pole holding up a *sharynak*'s hoop is a sacred object in the felt yurt, and if the angle formed by this pole equals 62 degrees, then it corresponds to the equatorial angle of the galactic meridian.

The yurt has incorporated many types of Kazakh national applied arts: woodwork, weaving, felt making, mats and ropes weaving, thread twisting, pattern and ornament embossing. The preservation of this masterpiece, the most valuable monument of culture and art, in its original form for posterity has historical significance. The role of the Kazakh yurt in household use was crucial as well as its role in the artistic culture of the younger generation, the formation of their love for their native land, its history and the past of their people. No doubt, much has been done in this direction, but much more remains to be done. The Republic of Kazakhstan started the flow production of yurts. The felt-manufacturing factory in Ushtobe produced 180,000 of yurts before 1979. The area of each yurt was on average 19 square meters. However, the manufacture quality of these yurts was very poor. Yurt has been created by the people for centuries and stood the test of time. It still can serve well for rural workers, cattle-breeders and stock-farmers.



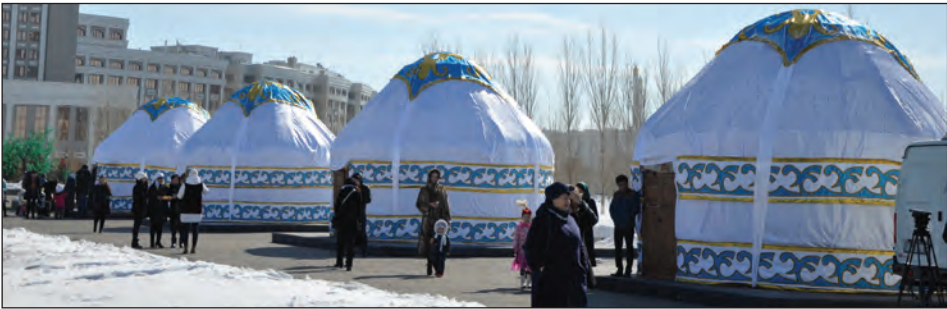
*Fig. 5: Yurts of various organizations during the celebration of Nowruz opposite the Independence Square and Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center in Astana (2015) (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)*

#### THE KAZAKH YURT NOWADAYS

The Kazakh yurt and its parts are actualized in the wedding rites. The threshold is perceived by Kazakhs as a border between the explored and unexplored world. Crossing



*Fig. 6: Yurts of various organizations during the celebration of Nowruz opposite the Alau Sports Complex in Astana (2015) (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)*



*Fig. 7: Yurts of various organizations during the celebration of Nowruz opposite the Alau Sports Complex in Astana (2015) (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)*





Fig. 8: Yurts during the celebration of Nowruz opposite the Alau Sports Complex in Astana (2015) (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)

this border with the right foot, a young bride becomes an “insider”; the border acts as a kind of filter: it “explores” the representative of the “foreign” species.

Kazakh yurts are set traditionally each year during Nowruz. Nowruz holiday is celebrated by all the peoples of Kazakhstan – representatives of different nationalities who have a common desire to live in peace and harmony with each other and to build a prosperous state. With the arrival of Nowruz, people welcome the New Year, spring and the sun. In the eastern calendar, Nowruz is really considered the beginning of the new year, or as it is also called: *Наурыз мейрамы құтты болсын* – Celebration of the New Day.

A rich *dastarkhan* is laid with love in yurts.

Yurts themselves are springlike decorated so that citizens could have a festive mood. Yurts have carpets with ornaments, leather goods, pitchers with rock paintings and dolls in national costumes.

Yurts are set to display the country’s national customs. In addition to the inside decoration, one can also observe the performances outside the yurt: a theatrical performance is the revival of the country’s traditions. There are also best yurt contests.

Kazakh inventors and innovators have found a modern use of this attribute of life. Currently, there is an electronic yurt which could teach children literature, traditions and culture of the Kazakh people, transmitted from generation to generation.

If for the Kazakh ancestors the yurt was a part of the world, today it introduces the next generation to a rich heritage of folk culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Kazakh applied art has a great spiritual and moral potential. It embodies various images – the ideals which have been served as the basis for training and education of the Kazakhs for centuries.

The research on the reflection of diverse national and cultural peculiarities in the semantics of applied art is currently urgent. This paper studies the essence of space and time



Fig. 9: Inside the yurt (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)



*Fig. 10: Inside the yurt (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)*



*Fig. 11: Fragments of the exhibition of handcrafts in Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center in Astana (photo: Tatigul Samuratova)*

in the applied arts, which consider universal conceptual categories and by virtue of their universality are reflected in products of decorative and applied arts.

Yurt is a nomad's dwelling, his microcosm, a constant companion in his unstable life. It accompanies the souls of men in another world. "May the *shanyrak* be steady and the dome [of the yurt] over their heads be reliable" – they say about the deceased. The celestial symbolism of the dome, taking into account the extreme popularity (more precisely, its great importance) of the image of the sky in the nomads' life was the reason of the widespread "domical" architecture in the east.

All these examples show how great the role of the felt yurt was in the life of nomads and how it affected their activities and management of the household. It is necessary to note that everything in the yurt had not only practical and household purpose, but symbolized a sacred meaning, pre-determining the place of man in this world.

In their nomadic life people considered the felt yurt not as a model of beauty, worthy of being exhibited in museums, but as an integral part of the vast space stretching under the blue sky.

Yurt, appeared thousands of years ago, remains relevant today. Lightweight, compactness, portability, and the possibility to use the yurt in all weather conditions make it competitive in the market of light constructions. The felt yurt is a dwelling for many Turkic-speaking peoples of Eurasia, which has been designed and managed down to the last detail for centuries.

The use of the foundations of Kazakh traditional culture in the modern Kazakh educational system and the disclosing of its rich and unique spatial and temporal peculiarities allow to solve urgent problems of our time: the formation of national identity and the preservation of the spiritual heritage of our ancestors.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the grant "The Best Teacher of Kazakhstan–2014". We thank our colleagues who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research. We would also like to show our gratitude to the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University for providing the research resources for this study.

## SIMBOLNA PODOBA JURTE V KAZAHSTANSKI UPORABNI UMETNOSTI

*Tatigul SAMURATOVA,*

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,  
5 Munitpasov Street, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: samyratovatk@mail.ru

*Gulzhanat AKHMETOVA,*

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,  
5 Munitpasov Street, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan

**POVZETEK**

*Prispevek se posveča vprašanju razumevanja problemov časa in prostora v delih kazahstanske uporabne umetnosti. Primarni namen raziskave je študija znanstvenih in teoretskih ter zgodovinskih in pedagoških temeljev kazahstanske jurte, kot tudi glavne merilne tehnike prostora, časa ter lažna predstavitev življenja in okoliškega sveta. Jurta uteleša dela uporabne umetnosti in povzema razumevanje duhovne in materialne kulture, estetske ideale ter ljudsko modrost, tradicijo in običaje v preteklosti, sedanjosti in prihodnosti uporabnih umetnosti. Tekom študije sta bili uporabljeni primerjalna in zgodovinska metoda. Prva faza raziskave je posvečena analizi filozofskih, literarnih, psiholoških, izobraževalnih, etnografskih, kulturnih in umetniških, metodoloških del, kar služi za teoretsko podlago. Druga faza razkriva glavne značilnosti konceptov prostora in časa v kazahstanski uporabni umetnosti in opredeljuje njihove izobraževalne funkcije. Tretja faza prinaša opis jurt, njihove tipe, elemente in simbole ter definira njihovo vlogo v kazahstanski kulturi. Avtor zaključí, da je razvoj jurt tesno povezan s tradicionalnim nomadskim življenjskim stilom kazahstanske družbe, njihovega družbeno-ekonomskega statusa ter ljudske samozavesti, kot tudi zgodovinskega procesa. Kazahstanska jurta tako ni samo del ljudske materialne kulture, temveč ima tudi sveti pomen ter vsebuje simbole, ki utelešajo različne informacije o verskih in mitoloških videnjih sveta.*

*Ključne besede: prostor in čas v uporabni umetnosti, spoznavanje, jurta, okrasje, starodavni Kazahstan, totemski mitološki lik, svetovno drevo, Velika Stepa*

## SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arginbayev, H. (1987):** Kazakh applied arts. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Aytaly, A. (2000):** National studies [Textbook]. Almaty, Arys.
- Basenov, T.K. (1958):** Applied art of Kazakhstan. Almaty, Kazakh State Fiction Publishing.
- Bayzhigitov, B.K. (1994):** Aesthetic nature of Kazakh art (Based on the material of folk creative work and fine arts). PhD thesis. Almaty, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University.
- Bezertinov, R.N. (2000):** Tengrianizm – religion of Turks and Mongols. Naberejnye Chelny, Ayaz.
- Faegre, T. (1979):** Tents: Architecture of the Nomads. London, John Murray.
- Gabitov, T. (2006):** Cultural studies [Textbook]. Almaty, Legal literature.
- Gritsanov, A.A. (2003):** The Newest Philosophical Dictionary. Moscow, Knizhnyi Dom.
- Hegel, G. (1975):** The Philosophy of Nature. Moscow, Mysl'.
- Ibrayev, Sh. (1993):** The world of epos: The poetics of the Kazakh heroic epic. Almaty, Gylym.
- Ibrayeva, K. (1994):** Kazakh ornament. Almaty, Өнер.
- Jelinčić, D.A. & F. Vukić (2015):** Creative Industries as Carriers of Urban Identity and Drivers of Development: From Directional Towards Participative Branding. *Annales, Series historia et sociologia*, 25, 3, 527–536.
- Kasimanov, C. (1995):** Applied arts of the Kazakh people. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Kazykhanova, B.R. (1977):** The role of the artistic heritage in aesthetic education. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Khazanov, A.M. (1984):** Nomads and the Outside World. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Klyashtorny, S.G. (1981):** The Mythological Subjects in Ancient Turkic Monuments. In: Kononov, A.N. (ed.): *Turkological collection*. Moscow, Nauka, 117–138.
- Kodar, A. (2002):** Steppe Knowledge: Essays on cultural studies. Astana, Foliant.
- Margulan, A. (1966):** The ancient culture of Central Kazakhstan. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Mauvieux, B., Reinberg, A. & Y. Toutou (2014):** The yurt: A mobile home of nomadic populations dwelling in the Mongolian steppe is still used both as a sun clock and a calendar. *Chronobiology International: The Journal of Biological and Medical Rhythm Research*, 2, 31, 151–156.
- Medoyev, A.G. (1979):** The engravings on the rocks of Sary-Arka, Mangyshlak. Alma-Ata, Zhalyln.
- Mukanov, M.S. (1979):** Kazakh domestic artistic crafts. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Mukanov, M.S. (1981):** Kazakh yurt. Alma-Ata, Kynar.
- Nurlanova, K.S. (1993):** The symbolism of the world in the traditional art of the Kazakhs. In: Karatayev, M.M. (ed.): *Nomads. Aesthetics: Cognition of the world of traditional Kazakh art*. Almaty, Gylym, 208–237.
- Omarova, G., Alpeissova, G. & A. Kuseubay (2015):** National Traditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Problems with the Preservation and Translation of Kazakh Traditional Music. *Acta Histriae*, 23, 2, 285–296.

- Samuratova, T.K., Musalimov, T.K., Albytova, N., Makhanov, M. & N.K. Omarbekova (2015):** Space and time as the fundamental elements of Kazakh world image. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 5 S2, 127–132.
- Serikkaliuly, Z. (1994):** *The Wise World Understanding*. Almaty, Bilim.
- Seydimbek, A. (1997):** *World of Kazakhs [Textbook]*. Almaty, Sanat.
- Seydimbek, A. (2001):** *The world of Kazakhs: ethnical and cultural reconsideration*. Almaty, Rauan.
- Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary (1985):** *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Moscow, Soviet Encyclopedia.
- Spirkin, A. (1993):** *Dialectical materialism*. Moscow, Progress Publishers, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/spirkin/works/dialectical-materialism/ch02-s04.html>.
- Suleymenov, B. & V.A. Moiseyev (1985):** *Ciocan Valikhanov – Orientalist*. Almaty, Publishing house “Nauka” of the Kazakh SSR.
- Taganov, I. N. & V.-V.E. Saari (2014):** *Ancient riddles of solar eclipses. Asymmetric Astronomy*. Saint Petersburg, TIN.
- Tazhimuratov, A. (1977):** *Master’s hands*. Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Urazbekova, L. & K. Lee (1980):** *Yurt – an ideal home of a nomad*. *Decorative Art*, 2, 8, 45–47.
- Zhanibekov, U. (1965):** *Kazakh art*. Almaty, Rauan.
- Zobov, R.A. & A.M. Mostepanenko (1974):** *On the Typology of Space and Time Relations in Art*. In: Egorov, B.F. (ed.): *Rhythm, Space and Time in Literature and Art: Collection of Articles*. Leningrad, Nauka.