

Yurt as a value of Kalmyk linguistic culture

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Abstract. The paper analyzes the linguistic culture associated with the ger ‘yurt’ – the Kalmyk house, objectively determined by the historically established traditional type of the nomad housing. A new approach to comprehending the sphere of ger ‘yurt’ is undertaken. The selected object is studied not only as a dwelling, but as a sacred, inhabited, developed space, the semantic dominant of the Kalmyk worldview, which determines people's ideas about “insider/outsider”, “honorary/profane”, “male/female”, “right/left”, “forbidden/permitted”, “happy/unhappy”, as well as the norms of behavior of insiders and outsiders in the living space of a Kalmyk dwelling. The existence of the “ishka ger” concept sphere in the Kalmyks’ linguistic culture is proved through the analysis of lexico-semantic field within mental area associated with ger, in terms of their value in material and spiritual culture, from the standpoint of its categories such as quantity, color, space, and behavior. It is established that every element of ishka ger, its size, weight, shape, material, and placement is designated not just by Kalmyk nomadic lifestyle, the stock-raising type of labor activity, and social organization features of the Kalmyks, but mental features of the Kalmyk nomad worldview. The yurt details, the objects of its interior are characterized from the point of view of symbolism, axiology in connection with the status of the ger as a “microworld of a nomad, a model of the universe.” The main research method is linguo-culturological: analysis of conceptual, figurative and value components of mental formations associated with the ger sphere. Lexico-phraseological, paremiological means extracted from lexicographic sources, as well as fragments from the texts of Kalmyk fiction, extracted by continuous sampling from the national corpus of the Kalmyk language are used as the material.

Keywords: Kalmyks, nomads, linguistic culture, “ishka ger” concept sphere

1 Introduction

The environment (steppe), its resources (lack of moisture, poor herbage), natural and climatic features (sharply continental climate) determined the main method of economic activity of the Kalmyks, namely, extensive cattle breeding. Depending on the given factors, formed by the geographical habitat of the ethnos, and on the level of its socio-social state, material and spiritual culture of people developed [1]. Nomadic mobility became a natural way of life for the Kalmyks, which determined all the features of the material culture of the ethnic group. We consider that the semantic dominant of Kalmyk culture is the ger ‘yurt’ – the house of a Kalmyk nomad, a nomadic wagon, an objectively determined, historically established traditional type of housing.

2 Problem Statement

Ishka ger (‘felt yurt’) is the Kalmyk habitat, with which his whole life is connected, in which he was born, where he lived and died. Every element of ishka ger, its size, weight, shape, material, and placement is determined by the Kalmyk nomadic way of life, cattle breeding, and peculiarities of the social organization of nomads.

3 Research Questions

In the paper, the selected subject is considered in the aspect of linguo-culturology as the most essential area of the Kalmyks’ linguoculture.

1. The crucial elements of the “ishka ger” sphere are studied from the view of their value in material and spiritual culture, from the standpoint of its categories such as quantity, color, space, and behavior.

2. Ishka ger and its elements are characterized from the position of symbolism and axiology in connection with the status of ger as a “microworld of a nomad, a model of the universe” [2].

4 Purpose of the Study

A study of the issue history indicates that ishka ger has been repeatedly considered in scientific literature: historical [3–5], ethnographic [6, 7], local history [3], cultural [8], and conceptual [9, 10] points of view. However, until now, ishka ger has not been investigated in the linguo-culturological aspect. Thus, the purpose of the study is to analyze mental area of the “ishka ger” from a linguo-cultural point of view.

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5 Research Methods

The main research method is linguo-culturological. A three-part methodology for the study of mental units [11, 12] has developed in this linguistics area: analysis of the conceptual, figurative and value component of mental education, which was the study basis.

6 Findings

In the study, we proceed from the existence hypothesis of the “ishka ger” concept sphere in Kalmyk linguistic culture. This is evidenced by:

- means of designation of various types of yurts in terms of species (degle ‘yurt, without an upper circle and a chimney’; жолм ‘zholomeyka without lattice walls’, ‘yurt made of poles and felt mats’; ishka ger ‘felt yurt’, etc.), size (arvn termтә ishкә ger ‘large yurt with ten wall bars’; нәәmn termтә khalmg ishкә ger ‘eight-walled Kalmyk yurt’, etc.), colors (tsahan ger ‘white yurt’, khar ger ‘black yurt’, bor ger ‘gray yurt’), destinations (khurla ger ‘khurul yurt’, gelhgә ger ‘gelung yurt’; ik ger ‘big yurt, older’),

- an extensive lexical-semantic field, which includes lexical units that nominate the details of the yurt (bagts ‘junction of the yurt lattice walls’; ram bagts ‘junction of the yurt lattices’; gerin buslur ‘a long thin hair rope encircling the yurt’; deevr ishкә ‘felt cover of the yurt upper part’; zavg ‘groove, gap in the yurt between the felt wall and the roof, used for storing small things’; gerin zeg ‘ornament along the yurt wall’; irg ‘bottom of inner wall of the felt yurt’; ork ‘smoke hole in the yurt roof’, ‘chimney’, ‘chimney’, ‘quadrangular felt covering a smoke hole of the yurt’); өркиn ishкә ‘a large felt mat of a chimney’; term ‘wall lattice of the yurt; the term udәр ‘belt fastenings of gratings’; toon ‘circle of the upper hole, chimney of the yurt’; unn ‘unina’, ‘a pole that supports the upper circle of the yurt’; totkh ‘lintel, door jamb’; tuurh ‘lower felt mat, which is placed over the poles on the roof of the yurt’; tuurhin ishкә ‘felt blanket for the yurt’; harach ‘wooden circle, mother of the yurt’; tsahrg ‘crossbar-crosspiece, cross-beam of the yurt chimney’; tsakh ‘a pole supporting a shelf with dishes’, ‘a wooden support’; erkн ‘threshold’; uudн ‘door’, and etc.),

- an extensive lexical-semantic field consisting of the names of household items in a yurt (baran ‘a place where family property is collected and neatly folded’; ovd (өvd), obsolete ‘small round pillow’; orn ‘bed, bunk’; op -der, der-devskr ‘bed’; orndg ‘wooden bed on which the husband used to sleep’; orndgin derndg ‘back of a wooden bed’; olgә ‘cradle, cradle’; sandl ‘chair’, ‘stool’; tulh ‘tagan, tripod’; tulhin shiir ‘legs of a tagan’; tulhin togrg ‘tagan circle’; ykug ‘cabinet’, ‘chest’; khәәrtsg ‘casket, casket, drawer’; shirә ‘table’; deexin shirә: a) ‘sacrificial table, on which the best food was placed as a sacrifice to the Burkhans’; b) ‘a low table on which refreshments are put in front of an honored guest’, etc.),

- expressive means in which the yurt elements are metaphorically comprehended (deevr ishкә delкә byтәж,

zag. ‘a blanket of felt covered the whole world’ (tsasn ‘snow’); and zholomeyka is always full of smoke’; zavgt zandn bura, zag. ‘a sandalwood stick, ‘twig’ in the crack; irgd Ivr-shivr, zag. ‘noise in the yurt lower part (khulhn ‘mouse’); Zag ‘two quadrangular felt mats are in the lower part of a wagon’ (ishкә бәрul ‘a piece of felt for grabbing the boiler’); dәchn dөrvn termтә, dөrvnsh miнhн unnta tsahan өргә ‘large white yurt-palace with forty-four lattice walls, with four thousand poles’, Dzhangar; totkh deer tohshin өрәл, zag. ‘half of a pretzel above the door jamb’ (sarin havru ‘crescent of the moon’); yүdin uga gert, y-tumn dәәchnr, zag. ‘there are many warriors near the yurt without doors’ (tarvsin yasn ‘watermelon seeds’); жолm gerin irg tsahan, Zag. ‘jolum’s bottom is white’ (zyrkn ‘heart’); өsrәd odgsn shavrн жолm gerin дүngә bolad yovv, Dzhangar ‘clods of earth knocked out by his hooves become the size of zholomeyku’),

- assessment of the yurt parts contained in cultural texts (barsin arsar deevrlgsn Bumbin tsahan өргә ‘white palace yurt covered with leopard skins’, Dzhangar; irg darldad бәәkh ‘live side by side’; the headquarters was built from eighty lattice walls’, Dzhangar; termin minhәdәр unlgsn ‘Bumbai palace-headquarters was built from a thousand unins laid on lattice walls’, Dzhangar; күж ulan zandar kharachlgsn ‘the circle for the yurt roof is made of fragrant sandalwood’, Dzhangar; ger dotr gestә möha, zag ‘a pot-bellied snake is in the house (arhmәх ‘lasso’),

- spatial arrangement of people and objects in the yurt in accordance with the meaning of “honorable/ordinary” (höөmr“(front) place where an honored guest was placed),

- rules of human behavior in a yurt from the standpoint of “friend/foe”, “senior/junior”, “honorary/profane” (bayr ik giж orndan bicha duul, zovлd ik giж orndan bicha uul, after ‘if joy overflows the soul, do not sing in bed, if life is hard, do not cry in bed’; deglә ger өrkәn bardag, degd kersu biyen bardg, lit. ‘half of a van spoils the smoke hole, excessive cleverness spoils a person’; khoomr ‘(front) place where an honored guest was placed),

- ‘yurt’ in the philosophical understanding of life (khadyn ger өөрдж, tavn erstә ger holdж, zag. ‘a house in the rock approached, and the five-walled yurt moved away (ykl ‘death’; har gertan khan, bor gertan bogd, pogov. ‘in his black yurt - khan, in his gray yurt – bogdo’; orn deer kevtsn өvgnәs or ergsn kovyn, pos. ‘than an old man who is accustomed to lying on a bed is better than a young man who has wandered around the world’; then the chimney opens’; uutsn shored, cheen shirad, posl, ‘ass in dust and dirt, and with thoughts on the throne’).

From a material point of view, a ger ‘yurt’ is a Kalmyk dwelling, most adapted to the natural and climatic conditions of nomadic steppe cattle breeding, durable, mobile, simple in terms of device (it took a couple less than an hour to disassemble/install a yurt). In winter, it protected its inhabitants from bad weather, in summer – from the scorching sun. From the point of view of the spiritual ger, a ‘yurt’ is a developed territory,

a place where family/tribal grace is located, protecting its inhabitants from evil forces. This allows us to consider that the ger 'yurt' as a valuable dominant of Kalmyk culture, connecting the material and spiritual principles in Kalmyk worldview.

In speech practice and Kalmyk linguistic consciousness, the name *ishka ger* 'felt yurt' was established behind the nomadic dwelling of the Kalmyk. However, from the point of view of the owner's social characteristics, the yurt is designated differently: *tsahan ger* 'white yurt', *khar ger* 'black yurt', *bor ger* 'gray yurt', *khurla ger* 'khurul yurt', *gelhgə ger* 'gelunga yurt', *жолм* 'zholomeyka, a yurt made of poles and felt mats', *деңлө* 'a yurt without a kharacha, where the unins are tied directly into a bundle' [13], *ik ger* 'a large yurt, that is, an older one, as a sign of respect for parents family' [7], *hosh* mouth. 'second yurt (at the main one)' [14], 'carriage of an adult single son of a wealthy Kalmyk' [7], 'type of shepherds' roaming: shepherds follow the herd without a wagon, only with a pack camel, and a riding horse under oneself' [13]. The distinctive features of the yurts' varieties were: color (*tsahan* 'white', *khar* 'black', *bor* 'grey'), size (*ik ger* 'big yurt, father's yurt'), purpose (*khurla* 'khurul', *gelhgə* 'gelunga', *hosh*).

The phrase *tsakhan ger* 'white yurt' means a yurt that belonged to wealthy Kalmyks, members of the clergy, newlyweds. Yurts intended for religious needs were large and were also covered with *tsahan ishkəhər* 'white felt'. A characteristic feature of such yurts, in addition to color, was the size. I. Zhiteckij explains the white color of the yurts of wealthy Kalmyks: "Kalmyk sheep are red, there are few white and black sheep" [13]. White wool for felt coverings of yurts was purchased at fairs, it was not cheap, so it was available only to wealthy Kalmyks. I.V. Bentkovskij described the wagons of wealthy Kalmyks as "felt is not so smoked and always strong, and there is less rubbish and dirt around. The gray-yellowish color of the wagon felts indicates the admixture of camel hair in them, it hints at the wealth of the resident." [7]

Khar ger 'a simple, black yurt', *bor ger* 'a gray, nondescript yurt of a commoner' [14] belonged to poor families, got their name from the gray-black color of the *kosh* that covered the yurt. *Khar ger* is strongly associated with poverty in fiction and everyday consciousness of the Kalmyks [15]. Nevertheless, in the literature we find objective explanations for the color of the *kosh* covering the yurts of poor Kalmyks. It seems that the color of the dwelling is gradually correlated with the semantics of black and white in the color symbolism of the Kalmyks. It is known that in Mongols' culture, the white color "identifies happiness and prosperity, purity and nobility, honesty and kindness, honor and high position in society" [16], "black color means negative (evil, dark, cruel, unhappy, profane)" [17]. The color of the yurt's elements is also based on the color symbolism. In the yurts of rich owners and *khurul* yurts, wooden parts (*unn*, *term*, *udn*, *kharach*, etc.) were usually painted red, a symbol of joy [17]; in the yurts of the poor, they were not painted, but with time completely blackened from smoke [7].

At the end of the nineteenth century, researchers note the use of the so-called semi-vans [13]: *жолм* and *денла* for the Kalmyk poor. They could serve as a temporary home for shepherds who wandered with their flocks without families. *Holm* was a roof, without bars, which was placed directly on the ground by *unins*, *denla* – a yurt without a *kharacha*, in which *unins* are tied directly into a bundle. Often poor peasants' semi-vans were covered with *zəgsär* 'chakan', *nohahar* 'grass' instead of *kosh*. These "truncated" views of the Kalmyk dwellings testified to the material condition of the owner. The characteristic features of such types of yurts were their fragility, they poorly protected inhabitants from bad weather.

The yurt size also contained information about its owner. Usually among Kalmyks, *nəəmn termtə halmg ishkə ger* 'eight-walled Kalmyk yurt' was used. Besides, yurts could be smaller (for instance, from 6 *term* 'sten') and larger (for example, from 12 *term* 'sten') in size. The yurt size was determined by the number of *term* 'walls', *unin* 'pole', which were made of wood (walnut, pine), the number of *kosh* necessary to cover it. According to I.V. Bentkovskij, 12 *poods* of pure autumn shearing wool from 240 sheep was required for one six-bar yurt. Large felt mats served on average for three years, quickly lost their protective properties, wearing out from bad weather and moths (tobacco infusion, which was impregnated with felt, did not help). The wooden elements of the yurt fell into disrepair from frequent migrations (up to 15 times a year), on average they served 10–15 years, the cost of parts made them inaccessible to many families of the poor. All this explains the living of poor Kalmyks in small yurts, as well as semi-vans, the use of improvised materials (for example, *chakan*, *grass*) but not *kosh* to cover yurts.

The Kalmyks usually roamed the *khoton* 'nomad camp.' There was a certain order of placement of yurts in the *khoton*, which was based on seniority in the kinship hierarchy and gender: center (*ik ger* 'large (oldest, father's) yurt'), below (yurts of married sons), on the right (yurt of married eldest son), on the left (yurt of a widow-daughter/sister, younger son) [13]. As we can observe, the spatial comprehension of the hierarchy "senior-junior", "male-female" was traced in the placement of yurts in the *khoton*: according to Kalmyk etiquette, the right side was considered more honorable than the opposite [7], and was male; the left one is female [17]. Thus, the type, size, color, material, location of the yurt reflected the ideas of the Kalmyks about the social organization of society (seniority, gender), spatial and color symbolism.

The Kalmyks' yurt, symbolizing their mastered space, where family grace was located, regulated the behavior of friends and strangers in the house. In the yurt, the left part, which housed the inventory for the men labor, was conceptualized as a male space; the right one, where the household belongings of a woman were located, was female. Moreover, the right side was interpreted as a place of honor, the left – profane. Honored guests were placed on the right side, family members and relatives – on the left [7]. The placement of people in the space of the yurt was subject to the principle of seniority: etiquette did not

allow the youngest to sit higher than the elder, turning his back on him when leaving the yurt was considered as ignorance [7].

With regard to the stranger, there were the following regulations: the stranger should not have entered the yurt without the permission of the owner, should not have been located in the owner place. A stranger (for example, a clergyman) could take a place of honor only at the owner's suggestion. There were strict rules of conduct for both friends and strangers regarding the sacred places of the yurt: hearth, threshold, door, and altar. The hearth, as a symbol of the inhabited, mastered, own space, meant the following rules: fire should never be extinguished, it was allowed to spit into it, fill it with water, sleep with feet up to the fire; when migrating, the fire was transferred to a new place, they turned to it with a request for offspring, wealth. The threshold symbolized the boundary between one's own and another's worlds. Certain rules existed regarding the threshold in order to preserve the happiness and grace of the family: it was forbidden to sit and stand on the threshold, to talk over the threshold, to cross the threshold without touching it with a right foot, which was also connected with the comprehension of the right side in Kalmyk culture as happy one. In the minds of modern Kalmyks, there are interesting ideas about the threshold: widowed people were associated with the threshold, because "they were on the border of the world of the dead and alive. Therefore, one cannot offend such people" (according to the informant B.T., aged 75). The door acted as a protection of its own, mastered space from alien, malicious forces. It should be faced "to the east, where the Dalai Lama lives, where all the saints are. But now the Kalmyks have made concessions to climatic requirements and put the van with the door to the south" [13]. Strict regulations were also observed in relation to the door. It was not permitted to knock loudly on the door, a stranger could enter only after bypassing the yurt on the right side and the owner's permission. The following rules were observed when leaving: go out facing inward, silently. It was considered a bad omen if the person stumbled when leaving, as this could harm the family grace. It was recommended to return and perform a series of actions to avoid harm. If the incoming one stumbled, then this was positively evaluated as an increase in family grace.

7 Conclusion

The conducted analysis makes it possible to consider ger as the central element of the Kalmyk worldview, uniting the people's ideas about "insiders/outside", "honorary/profane", "male/female", "right/left", "happy/unhappy." The expanded lexical-semantic field of nominations associated with the yurt, their comprehension in linguistic culture and communicative behavior allows us to conclude that the concept sphere "ishka ger" exists in Kalmyk linguistic consciousness. Further research will be aimed at studying the paremiological comprehension of the "ishka ger" concept sphere.

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