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The Concept of «Yurt» in the literature of Central Asia

The article deals with the substantial components of the basic concept of «Yurt». National-cultural and individual layers are identified. It holds in-detail description of the «passive layer» of the concept of «Yurt». As the material of description the works of the famous contemporary writers Ch. Aitmatov and B. Kanapyanov and B. Kerbabaev were considered. The researcher highlights language means that represent the concept of «Yurt»: lexical units in the literal sense, metaphorical designations, comparisons, epithets, figurative associations, symbolic assimilation. The focusing on the context of language units representing the concept of «Yurt» gives an opportunity to reveal the periphery of the concept, to describe the meaning shades that are not fixed in any lexicographical sources.

Key words: concept, signature components of the concept, the concept of the active layer of the concept, the passive layer of the concept, language tools, a metaphor, эпитет.

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Концепт «Юрта» в литературе Центральной Азии

В статье рассматриваются содержательные компоненты концепта «Юрта». Выявляются национально-культурный и индивидуально-авторский слои. Автор статьи подробно описывает «пассивный слой» концепта «Юрта». Материалом описания послужили произведения известных современных писателей Ч. Айтматова, Б. Канапьянова и Б. Кербабая. Исследователем были выделены языковые средства, репрезентирующие концепт «Юрта»: лексические единицы в прямом смысле, метафорические обозначения, сравнения, эпитеты, образные ассоциации, символические уподобления. Обращение к контексту употребления языковых единиц, репрезентирующих концепт «Юрта», позволило выявить периферию концепта и описать смысловые оттенки, не зафиксированные лексикографическими источниками.

Ключевые слова: концепт, индивидуально-авторский компонент концепта, активный слой концепта, пассивный слой концепта, языковые средства, метафора, эпитет.

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Орталықтың Азиясының әдебиетінде «Киіз үй» концепті

Мақалада «Киіз үй» концептінің құрылымдық компоненттері қарастырылып, әмбебап, ұлттық-мәдени және жеке авторлық қабаттары анықталады. Автор «Киіз үй» концептінің «пассивті қабатына» егжей-тегжейлі сипаттама береді. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде атакты жазушыларын Ч. Айтматовтің, Б. Канапьяновтің және Б. Кербабаяевтің еңбектері қолданылады. Зерттеу барысында «Киіз үй» концептін сипаттайтын метафоралық анықтаулар, теңеу, эпитет, образдық ассоциациялар мен символ мағыналы сөздер секілді лексикалық бірліктер айқындалады. Тікелей «Киіз үй» концептін қолдану контекстін қарастыру арқылы концепт өрісінің перифериясын дәлдеп, сөздіктерде бекітілмеген мағыналық реңктерді.

Түйін сөздер: концепт, концептінің дербес-авторлық компоненті, концептінің белсенді қабаты, концептінің пассивті қабаты, тілдік құралдар, метафора, эпитет.

The vicinity of an individual is his home. «Home is a simulation of the Universe; it is an ethnic cosmos in a small scale... On the one hand it is a footprint of cosmos around us, a house is built as a layout of what a man sees around him, that's why a house can be used to learn the worldview of people, the way they interpret the world» [1, 12].

It is impossible to imagine an everyday life of a nomad without his traditional house – a felt tent, or a yurt. In the poem «Along a mountain stream on horseback...» by a contemporary poet B. Kanapyanov, a yurt becomes a significant feature of the lifestyle of an ancient Turk and his descendants:

Many times grass changes itself,
There is a yurt beyond the cliff,
No break in link between us and the yurt
of an ancient nomad Turk [2, 126].

The word «yurt» originates from the old Turkic language. In the old Turkic language «yurt» means «house, property, dwelling, land, country», tur.chag., etc., jurt – «place for living, encampment, dwelling», «country». Probably, the initial meaning of the Turkic word was «the area needed for camping ground, for grazing live-stock» [3, 718].

In the «Explanatory Dictionary of Live Great Russian Language» by V.I. Dal the following historic and ethnographic data is given: «yurt is a property, an area, a land, a state // yurt in Bashkir is the same as *ulus* in Kalmyk but uru, clan, fellow-nomads of the same tribe, with their land // yurt, a nomad tent, a dwelling place of any kind, the Russians named this way in association with a Mongol yurt, in Kalmyk, Kyrgyz, Bashkir it is a wagon covered with a felt, *kibitka*» [4, v.4, 669].

In the «Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language» by M. Fasmer it is written that the word «yurt» has been borrowed «from the Turkic language, sr.tur.chagat.,tel., kypchak, jurt – living place, encampment, dwelling, in Altai «jurt» is «country, state, people», in Tatar «jurt is a yard with a built structure» [5, v.4, 534].

The generic notion of the old Turkic word «jurt» is «people» and «pasture», «land of clan». In the Kyrgyz and Kazakh languages «Ata-Jurt» means «Fatherland» (compare with the Kazakh proverb *Ескі жұрттың қадірі көшкенде білінер, ер жігіттің қадірі өшкенде білінер*, i.e. «After moving away one appreciates the old dwelling, after the old chap's death one appreciates his personality»).

In the modern Mongol language «ger, esgi gaer» means «yurt» and it is a synonym to the word «house». In the modern Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages «yurt» means a specific portable type of dwelling, i.e. it is not a house. In the «Encyclopedic Dictionary» by F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron there are not just encyclopedic but also ethnographic and cultural data about the structure and purpose of a yurt. «Yurt is a word frequently used to denote dwelling premises of the majority of our non-Russian citizens; it actually should be applied to dwellings of Mongol nomads (the Mongols, Buryats, Kalmyks) because it originated from the Mongol word «urto» meaning an encampment. Being a dwelling of a nomad who regularly moves, a yurt has to be convenient for transporting. This specification is met by a felt tent that can be disassembled within half an hour or an hour and assembled back within the same period of time» [6, v.81, 393].

The structure of a yurt is surprisingly uncomplicated and rational. It is described in detail in ethnographic papers [7, 8]. A yurt («uy», «keiiz uy») is made of a timber frame and a felt cover. Portable wooden components are the combination of three components: kereghe (latticework of rafters), uyik (posts supporting the crown) and shanyrak (a circular «crown» of the structure), each part is at a certain level of the virtual vertical axis. These parts are covered with felt. The Turkic people counted days and months by motion of Sun; thus they proportioned their yurts and, in particular, the diameter of shanyrak, the number of posts and the height of rafters in accord with their observations. This information is encoded in a Kyrgyz riddle about the parts of yurt: «*Жетмиш кемпир жер тишдейт. Алтмиш кемпир ай тишдейт*» that means «Seventy old women bite Earth, sixty old women nibble Moon» [9, 260].

The structure of a yurt and its proportions are designed with consideration of the solar motion rhythms. The interior of a yurt is nominally divided into twelve sections corresponding to the twelve-month cycle calendars. Each section had the name of a month of the so called animal calendar (see F.A. Fieldstrup «About Rituals in Kyrgyz Life in the Beginning of XX Century»). For a nomad a spot of sunlight in his yurt tells rather accurately the time of a day.

The interior design of a yurt reflects the nomadic life style specifics. A yurt was distinctly divided by its design into the right and left sides. The left side was for males and it was the place for a saddle, a halter chain and other items for riding and stock-raising. The right side was for women of the house with dishes and sleep accommodations. This division reflects the distinct opposition «right / left» of the dual orientation system «east / west», i.e. the cult of Sun. The solar cult was widely spread among the Central Asia nomads and it could be seen through their rituals and myths, for example, the myth about four Suns, the myth about Crow greeting Sun, and such traditional holidays as Na'uryz.

A hearth was in the middle of a yurt. According to the opinion of archeologists and ethnologists, the central location of a hearth is an unaltered tradition of any nomad's dwelling. In addition to its practical purpose, the hearth was the object of worship for all pageants of the world and had a highly honored status in the cult rituals, probably, thanks to being the place for fire. The cult of fire is known actually to all peoples of the world, including the Turkic and Mongol peoples. Fire was not only cleansing and protecting against everything harmful but also patronizing a man, a family, children, bestowing happiness, fortune, and offspring. This is the reason of sacrificial rituals to fire when it and the hearth, as its place, gets a few drops of fat, oil, milk. For example, the Kyrgyzs have a ritual of «отко гирды» (means «entering the fire») that was exercised at the first arrival of a newly-wed bride into her husband's place. Feeding fire in the hearth with fat, oil, milk she asked the spirit of house for protection in the new home and for allowing her to join the clan of her husband [9, 63]. Another ritual was about making the first fire in the yurt of newly-weds because it could not be borrowed from neighbours. Fire was considered to be the protector of a family, and it could not be borrowed or lent because those who give it away would give away their good luck [9, 60]. It was forbidden to jump over the hearth, spit in it, pour water into it.

Another sacred spot in a yurt is its smoke flap. According to a famous ethnographer of the XIX century F.A. Fieldstrup, the Kazakhs used to throw a bone of sheep's neck (the Kyrgyzs threw the head of a sheep) through this opening to ensure ventilation that keeps the sound flame. This way they offered a sacrifice to the air drain. Among the Kazakhs there was a belief that a prematurely born baby would be helped by spirits of ancestors if he/she is placed closer to the top of a yurt [10, 70].

Shanyrak has a significant symbolic meaning. It is the symbol of home, of hearth, of procreation. It is the national emblem of nowadays Kazakhstan not by accident. Shanyrak is the heirloom of a family passing from father to the eldest son upon father's death (a yurt itself is inherited by the youngest son and is called «kara chamgarak» (translated «black chamgarak») or chon uy (translated «big yurt»), i.e. father's yurt, inherited yurt [9, 64]. The black shanyrak of a father's yurt was treated as sanctity. There is still a custom to invite the eldest son-in-law who has fathered many children to lift the shanyrak for a newly-wed couple, and afterwards he is generously showered with gifts for this deed.

One more sacred part of this dwelling is a pillar in the middle of a yurt «symbolizing the sacred tree, the World Tree, that conveys the idea of life, fortune, helps to give birth and raise children» [9, 89].

The whole life of a nomad is connected with a yurt. A yurt is not only an item of the material culture of nomadic peoples, but also a reflection of their understanding of the world. The worldview of a nomad is reflected in the shape, structure, proportions of this ancient dwelling. The soft rounded shape of a yurt perfectly fits the steppe landscape without disturbing the natural harmony of a man and his ambiance. Overlooking the flat vast expanses it is well seen and symbolizes the World Mountain, the basic of the basics of the sum of things. The layout of items inside a yurt is

not only rational but also reflects the order of the world. It is arranged in compliance with the ideas of the highest order, with vertical and horizontal structures.

Its dome-like shape repeats the shape of the vault of Sky that is a part of the wide world. «Geometrically, the simple exterior and the circular shape of the yurt accentuated by bright patterns on its top that are visible at a distance display the horizontal and vertical model of the Universe» [11, 75]. The yurt is a sacred center with the rest of the world lying along its periphery. *A propos*, the characteristic curve of its semi-sphere is repeated in burial mounds, domes of mausoleums and mazars.

A yurt is the center of gravity on Earth for an ancient Turk. In fairy tales a yurt is the point where a plot starts unfolding itself: a hero leaves his yurt in the beginning of it and either returns to it or finds a new one for himself, as in the Kazakh fairytales «Er-Tostyk», «Alpamys-Giant», «Biy Baltekey's Judgement» [12].

In modern literature of Central Asia a yurt is also an indispensable attribute not only of lives of ancient nomads but also of writers' contemporaries. In Ch. Aitmatov's novella «Camel's Eye» upon the appeal to Young Communists the main character arrives to the Anarhai Steppe to bring it under cultivation. The name of this chap is Kemal and he lives in a yurt as his nomad ancestors. All events shaping his future take place in a yurt.

The traditional lifestyle of the Kyrgyzs, Kazakhs, and Turkmens cannot be imagined without a yurt (the Turkmens called the traditional movable dwelling *kibitka*). Young Sultanmurat, another character of Ch. Aitmatov's novella «Early Spring Cranes», lives in a yurt. «Sultanmurat walked around a bit, somehow he felt himself scared. Absence of people, deadly silence, the pitch-dark night seemed endless. Busy with work and home chore he had never noticed before how, it turned out, scary was the outland steppe at night. He hurried back *to the yurt*» [13, 409]. After kidnapping Altynai, a girl from the novella «First Teacher» by Ch. Aitmatov, finds herself in a yurt of a village high in mountains. «I came back to consciousness in a yurt. Early stars were tranquil, disturbed by nothing, they were peeking inside the yurt through its open top» [14, 38].

«Decisive Step» is a historical novel by a renowned Turkmen writer B. Kerbabaev born on Kouki-Zeren village of Tenjen province, thus he knows well the life of peasants to start the novel with the description of a village. «Along the channel there was a large and peaceful well-settled village spreading from east to west the rows of its felt houses. It was not different from any other village of the Tejen province, it looked as a twin-brother of any other Turkmen village – the country of fierce sun and waterless deserts» [15, 1]. With uncommon warmth he describes a modest *kibitka* of the main character, a peasant, Artyk, giving an idea of a traditional Turkmen dwelling: «*In the female half there is an old rug sack with tatty tussles, it is full of dishes and looks as if it puffed out its belly and spread arms. Along the same wall a trunk, covered with white tin-plate, is hiding, there are five or six discolored quilts on it. On both sides of a lattice wall two uncheerful red worn out chuvals are drooping in the depth of the kibitka. Above them there are two old textile bags of an unidentifiable color. Two smoky sheepskin hats found their places on the knots of a wooden post. The opposite corner was occupied by two big chuvals: one had a strainer on it, the other – a saddle. At the entrance the bundles of black cords and calf-skin strips were hanging on. A red felt rug with worn-out patterns covered the front part of kibitka, another shabby rug was next to the hearth. Only the warp of a woven cord with some fringes was left, it was hanging from the top of kibitka, black from flare. The tips of posts supporting the top part of the dwelling got bent because of smoke ... Artyk loved his tiny smoky kibitka, only one hundred posts and four wings big*» [15, 3]. The eyes of the writer glide along the curved walls and notice all details of Artyk *kibitka*'s interior: the old rug sack for dishes, a trunk decorated with white-tin plate, discolored quilts, old textile bags, a strainer, a saddle, calf-skin strips, and a red felt rug. The poor place is tidy; the female and male sections are distinctly separated.

While for characters of stories by Ch. Aitmatov and B. Kerbabaev a yurt (its Turkmen option is *kibitka*) is a traditional dwelling and description of its ethnographic features tells us about the lives of Kyrgyz and Turkmen peoples, the yurt in B. Kanapyanov's «Tamga-Tas (Miano Yasushi)» has a sacred meaning and is considered to be a temple conveying the nomads' idea of cosmos. The

yurt becomes a place where a tired traveler, even a war prisoner, would be suggested a cup of tea, a plate of traditional bes-barmak and boursaks, a place where he can get a shelter. It is the place where a traveler can enjoy a conversation, have some rest, listen to a dombra; it is the place where a person can speculate on eternal matters gazing at stars through shanyrak; it is the place where the space reflects the train of thoughts of a nomad. «Saburo-san was *utterly enjoying himself: he was deep in his thoughts while sipping green tea and studying with interest the interior of the yurt where through the open top – tunduk-- could be seen white clouds moving against the blue background of the sky...* Miano Yasushi, intuitively following the calmness of self-composed Saburo-san, also studied kerege of the yurt with hides of a wolf, a snow-leopard and a fox. After taking a bath in a hot mineral spring that was followed by a bowl of fermented milk and a cup of green tea *in the temple named yurt*, Miano was ready to listen to sensei Saburo-san endlessly» [2, 74-75].

The fundamental principle of a nomad is openness to Cosmos. His dwelling confirms this principle: it can be disassembled and moved to another place within counted hours. An acknowledged Russian traveler, ethnographer, and orientalist A.I. Levshin, who was called Herodotus of the Kazakh people by Chokan Ch. Walikhanov [16, v.1, 164], visited the central part of the Great Steppe, the area of modern Kazakhstan in the middle of XIX century and was astounded by the greatness and tranquility of the expanses he saw. He saw people ready to move to another place and asked «Why do migrate?» An old Kazakh woman said «A human being must move because Sun, Moon, stars, animals, fish – everything moves; only ground and dead people stay in the same place» [17, 119].

The life of an ancient nomad is based on perpetual motion, he is not static, he does not build up, he does not destroy, he naturally fits the Nature and follows it by moving and transforming together with it, he is subject to it.

Thus, the analysis results in the semantic content of the concept of Yurt that covers the following segments of its notion: a yurt is a portable dwelling of the Central Asian nomads, easily assembled and disassembled; a yurt is a culture-bound item next to extinction; a yurt is a house protecting in the uncomfortable steppe, a yurt is a place where the spirits of ancestors are preserved, a yurt is the world governed by the steppe principles, a yurt is the ultimate beginning, the keeper of the spiritual dimension, a yurt is the moral and aesthetic space where a person is formed in the traditions and customs, a yurt is the unalienable component of steppes, of the Central Asian landscape, a yurt is the dearest and nearest for the peoples of Central Asia, a yurt is the reflection of connections between a man and the nature, a yurt is the symbol of hospitality of a steppe-dweller, a yurt is the symbol of perpetual motion and transformation, a yurt is a reminder of the eternal skies and Tengri-god, a yurt is the sacred connection between Man, Earth and Sky.

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