

The Yurt

The Authenticity of The Nomadic Dwelling in The 21st Century



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Abstract

This dissertation explores the meaning and hereditary values of the first memorable construction of the Kazakh nation that came upon us in the 15th century- the yurt. The core questions that are going to be covered in this dissertation is how the yurt was utilised and valued in the ancient times of the Kazakh nomadic nation and how its implementations in the modern world have or have not changed in comparison to the ancient times. Subjects covering the history and the construction methods of the yurt are the most common in the world of history; however, the modern output and the authenticity of the yurt is not widely covered by other writers. To determine the authenticity of the yurt, this dissertation will focus on the reasons that make this temporary nomadic architecture such a valuable construction to the nation and look at the authenticity of the yurt today, using a study conducted in Central Kazakhstan of utilising the yurt in eco-tourism. The study will look at the tourism in a yurt in rural areas through the prism of a group of tourists and their perspective on the uniqueness and originality of the yurt. The findings concluded that camping in a nomadic dwelling did not fully translate the authenticity of the construction methods, ecological and hereditary value.

Contents

10 Definition of the yurt

14 Introduction

18 Chapter 01

Uses of The Yurt in The Past

Uses of The Yurt Today

25 Chapter 02

The Yurt- UNESCO Heritage

Yurt's Historic Value

Yurt's Sustainable Value

37 Chapter 03

Utilising The Yurt in Eco-Tourism

Authenticity of The Yurt in Eco-Tourism

Case study: 'Kyzylarai' Tour

45 Conclusion

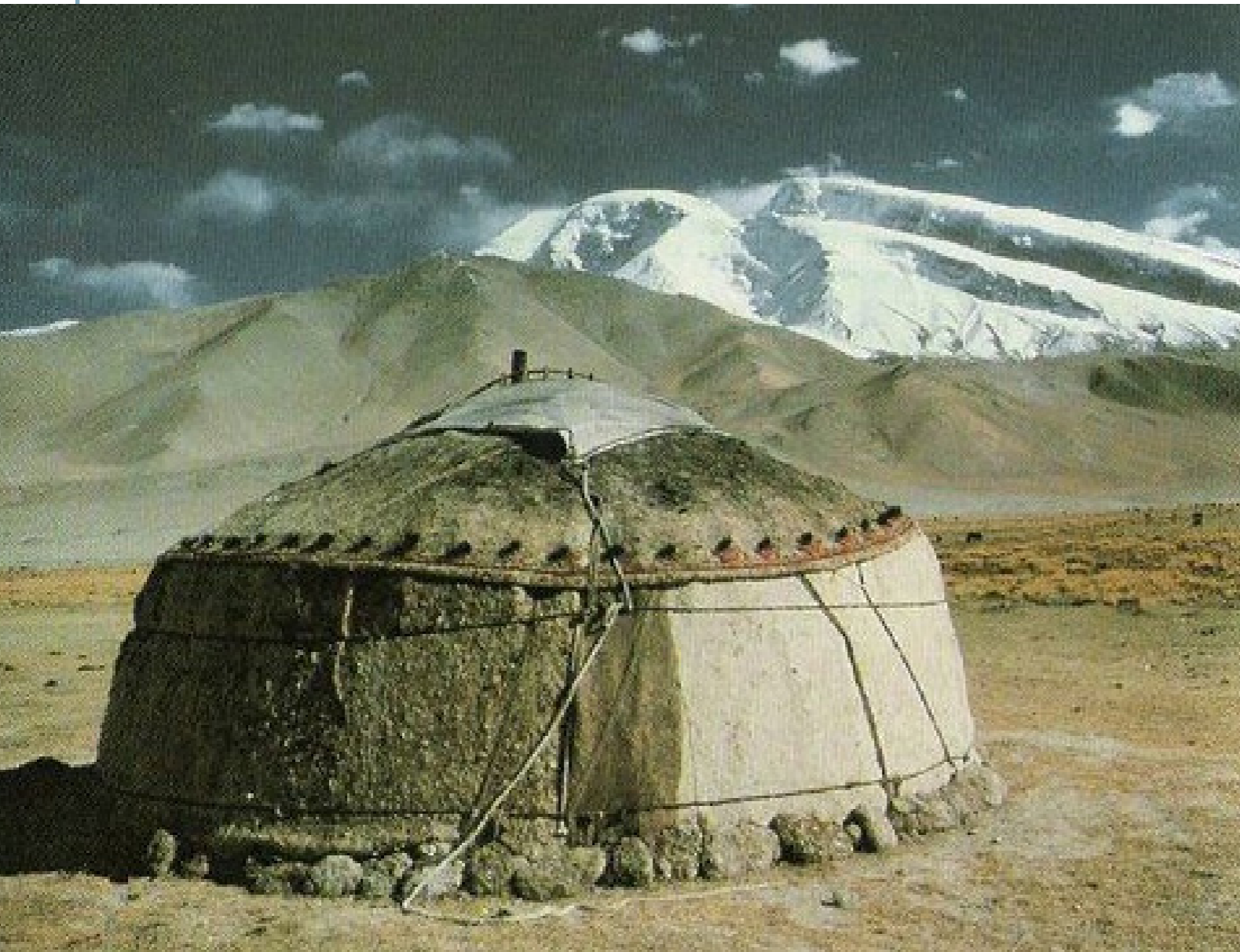


Fig 02
Ancient Felt Yurt, *Rodsbot*

The Yurt

The yurt is an ancient nomadic dwelling that originated in Central Asia, they were designed to be easily erected and dismantled as movement was crucial for nomadic tribes. To this day yurts are one of the oldest constructions of vernacular shelters used by ancient civilisations that are still used today in different variations. Its circular wooden structure covered with felt provides warmth in winter and coolness in summer.

People used to say «The beauty and wealth of the yurt begins from its door» and therefore the installation of it begins with the door 'esik', which in the old days always faced the east. The inside of the yurt is divided into seven parts: 1. 'Tor'- the place of honour, positioned furthest from the door, usually dedicated to honourable guests. 2. The place of the owner, on the left side of the place of the honor. 3. Kitchen- closer to the door from the place of the owner. 4. Place for younger members of the family, to the right of the place of honour. 5. Storage for horse gear, located in the right half of the yurt, by the young family



Fig 03

Construction Sequence of The Yurt

Taken from UNESCO: Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity - 2014,
'Traditional knowledge and skills in making Kyrgyz and Kazakh yurts'

Introduction

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world located in Central Asia, bounded on the northwest by Russia, on the east by China, and on the south by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Aral Sea, and Turkmenistan. I was born in the city that was formerly the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (1929–91) and of independent Kazakhstan (1991–97)- Almaty, formerly (1855–1921) Verny. Being brought up in a country with such a rich history of nomadic traditions I started looking at how nomads originated in Kazakhstan, where and how my ancestors lived, and most importantly how they influenced what we call 'modern' architecture now.

The most common etymological hypotheses, proposed by J.T. Zenker (1866), A. Vambery (1878: 20), and V.V. Bartol'd (1911: 190), linked the ethnonym 'Kazakh' to nomadism. It is thought to derive from the verb 'kaz', which means to wander or roam, and was used to describe a man who, after leaving his country, tribe, or clan, is forced to wander off into the unknown. Kazakh nomads were first mentioned in the fifteenth century by the Turcic people, and were majorly connected to pastoral nomadism. To me, nomadic people were particularly interesting in this regard as they create communities and build remarkable structures quite different from those of the settled majority.

I have been brought up in the most hospitable and united nation one could ever imagine; Each Kazakh family's, including mine, biggest pride is their own home- a home that is always warm, well kept and welcoming. In our culture, a home is a place that shows your manners and values, and these traditions originated from the yurt- one of the first pieces of nomadic architecture created in Kazakhstan. The entire life of our nation was united with it as a symbol of Kazakh culture. The yurt was not just a dwelling,

it was a representation of a special ideology- a life without corners, life without restrictions, and life in harmony with nature. Whenever people talk about Kazakhstan, they imagine people on horses in the green foothill of Jaylyau, and that is exactly how it was centuries ago. These people on horses lived a nomadic lifestyle, utilised by the yurt, the ultimate traditional construction. Even though Kazakhstan is much more than that, I still, like most of the people, think of it as a nomad land with beautiful white dome structures located in the deep green landscape. The reason for that, is my complete fascination with the yurt, its temporariness, freedom, lightness and the simplicity of life it offers. From the outside it looks like a tent covered in felt with ornaments, but in reality it is a genius structure that can be transported, assembled and disassembled, keeping warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer; These properties make the yurt the most sustainable creations of ancient architecture in Kazakhstan

The Kazakhstani steppes reflect a long history of people interacting with the environment; to this day, the yurt remains our heritage and we are not giving up on this construction of ancient times and are keen on utilising it in every way possible to educate and show foreigners what Kazakhstan is proud of and known for. With the help of adapting it to the 21st century and its social norms, came the growth in popularity of neo-nomadic tourism from people from all over the world. However, the question of authenticity has risen to the surface; are Kazakhs providing tourists with an authentic experience of true nomadic lifestyle or has the use of nomadic culture just become a territorial 'brand'? A key question for Kazakhstan's local eco-cultural tourism industry in rural areas is how to strike a balance between

the preservation of traditional nomadic heritage and the organisation of commercial re-enactment of heritage activities to increase the number of visitors in the villages while maintaining a 'traditional' approach to preserving cultural authenticity.

Chapter 01

This chapter will focus on the traditional use of the yurt and its use today. I would like to begin this chapter with Paul Oliver's definition of vernacular architecture, as the yurt is a prime example of the original vernacular construction. In his lecture on vernacular architecture (By, Of, And For: Vernacular Prepositions, Architectural Association) he explains that vernacular architecture is a type of local or regional construction that uses traditional materials and resources from the area where the building is located, making it unique to different parts of the world and even serving as a means of reaffirming an identity.

Kazakh nomads used to move several times a year and needed a transportable shelter, so they devised a circular structure out of locally available materials. The traditional core of the yurt was made of light wood poles gathered into a lattice structure (fig. 4) ; these poles were made from willow, birch, poplar, or even bamboos depending on the area in which the nomads roamed. The lattice was gathered and tied with animal leather, and the felt that covers the yurt is typically made of wool collected from domesticated sheep, goats, or yaks, as nomads are often herders. Oliver chose the term «shelter» over «architecture» because the latter «has become a qualitative term, so that some buildings are considered 'architecture,' while others are not»; he discussed brief case studies of various building traditions, including Mongol, the closest building tradition to Kazakh's. He contended that the meaning, design, and other forms of architecture can only be understood in their specific context; “Only by endeavouring to understand the values of the people can we get an insight

¹ Paul Oliver, “The Anthropology of Shelter”, in Michael Keniger (ed.), Market Profiles (Conference Proceedings, University of Queensland, 1979), 14.

into what shelter really means.”¹ From this we can understand that the yurt is not just a construction, it is a shelter that translates culture and traditions of nomads of Kazakhstan, it makes us think about the nature of the building as an artifact.

With time, most of the Kazakhs, except the shepherds with temporary accommodations, acquired a new way of living and stopped migrating; the traditional uses of the yurt have gradually changed. Before the Soviet Rule, nomads were very much present in the steppes of Central Asia. Many nomad families of Kazakhstan were highly dependent on herding. Most of them spent their short summer in the mountains with their livestock of sheep, goats and camels which grazed in pastures, in winter they migrated down to small villages where they lived in yurts. Herders stayed in the area depending on the amount of grass that was available to feed their animals. Nomads moved around on horses, men rode on horses and women rode on horseback, while camels were used to move different possessions including parts of the yurt. During that time the yurt was the only means of shelter for Kazakh nomads. They lived in collapsible round yurts in the spring, summer, and autumn, and flat-roofed earthen huts in the pastures in the winter. Kazakh yurts come in two variations- big and small. The big yurt is made up of two parts, the lower part is a cylindrical shape, and the upper part is in round bow shape; the other type is the small yurt, which has a tapered shape. The woven walls of the cylinder are about 1.5 meters in height, and each wall piece is about 3.2 meters in width. Depending on the size, a yurts can be made up of 6 to 12 woven wall pieces². Yurts are easy to put up and pull down to be moved.

The Frame

Made of willow poles, split for the khana, whole for the roof poles.

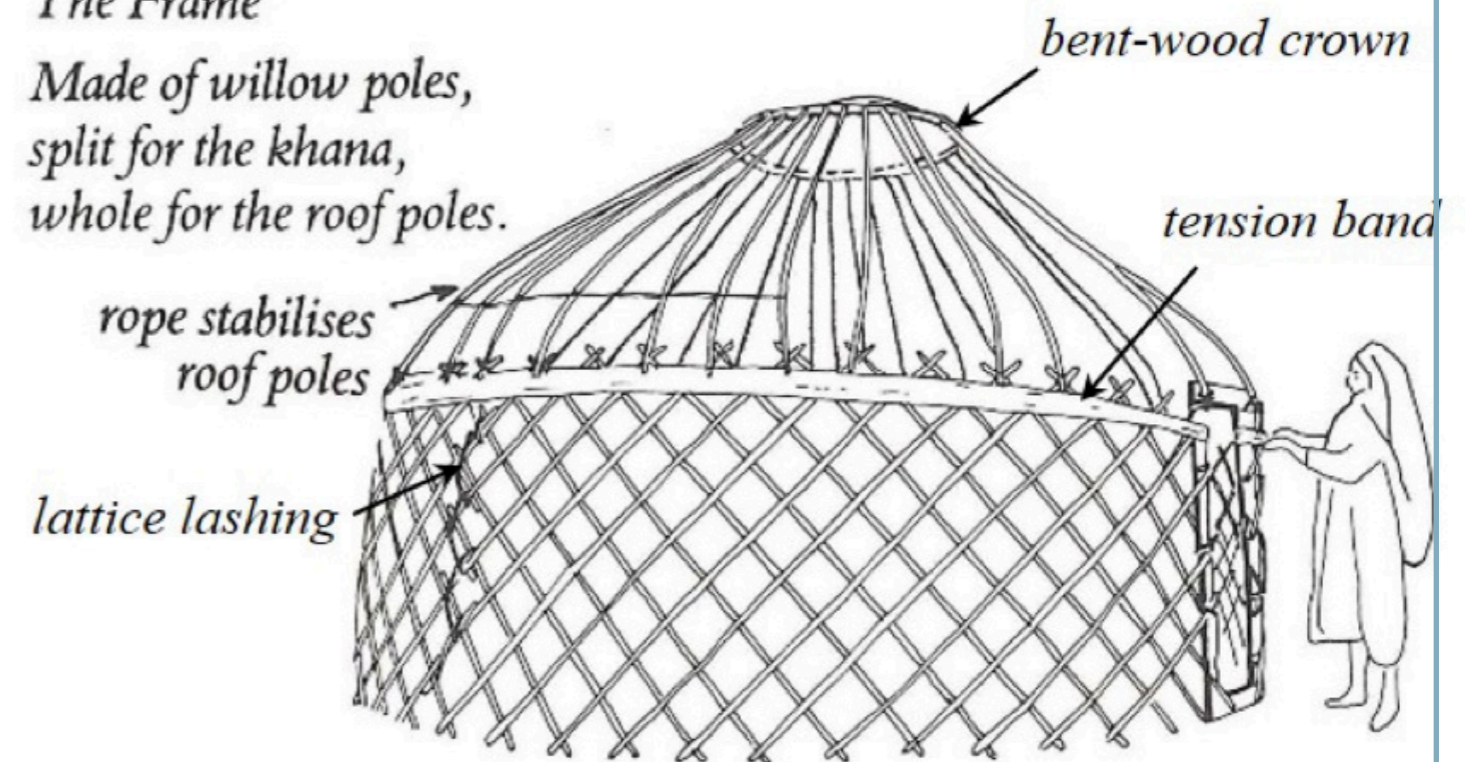


Fig 04

Yurt frame construction, Faegre, T, 1982: *The Kazak Yurt. Mimar*

² Jeffrey Hays, "Kazakh Nomadic Life and Yurts." Facts and Details, 16 January 2022, https://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Kazakhstan/sub8_4b/entry-4645.html.

The Kazakhs remained nomadic until the 1920s, when the Soviet government declared nomadic life inefficient. The government attempted to persuade Kazakhs and other nomadic peoples to settle down. Former nomads were assisted by the Soviets in the construction of brick and concrete homes equipped with electricity, television, and other modern amenities. Some Kazakhs maintain a semi-nomadic resistance, moving with their animals to summer pastures and living in yurts. Traditionally, many Kazakhs have lived in yurts in the summer and wood- and adobe houses in the long winter.

What happened to the nomadic yurts being used as shelters if they are not utilised by the majority anymore? Yurts are now widely used as a tourist attraction in Kazakhstan, attracting people from all around the world to experience a nomadic lifestyle, taste Kazakh food, and get immersed into the traditions and customs. There are various Yurt-restaurants located all around Kazakhstan, usually outside the city centre that offer tourists a wide range of traditional meals. Even more yurts can be found in rural areas, or in special ethno-villages for tourists, like Burabay or Almaty region. These yurts offer tourists an overnight stay for short stay tourists or have a function of a hotel for longer stays. People might think that these yurts look exactly the same from the outside, although the way they are made now is far from the traditional way. The frame is made of metal and the wall coverings are made from synthetic materials. The way they are laid out inside is also very different from the traditional way. If before there was a whole hierarchy of placing the kitchen, space for older and younger members of the family, along the storage for horse gear (fig. 5); The indoor space adapted to the function of a certain yurt, being a restaurant with a number of tables, or a sleeping yurt with beds (fig. 6).

Even though the yurt has lost its uniqueness in being a mobile, lightweight structure, since Kazakhs stopped living a fully nomadic lifestyle, nomadic homes became a perfect concept of promoting ecotourism, in this way an old tradition continues to live on, keeping the ancient construction alive to this day. Tiberghien and Xie (2018) defined a concept of 'neo-nomadic tourism culture' used to qualify 'the new state of authenticity' of Kazakh cultural heritage, which has sustained a commercialisation of its cultural landscapes, artifacts, and traditions for the sake of ecotourism development³.

³ Guillaume Tiberghien and Philip Feifan Xie, 'The Life Cycle of Authenticity: Neo-Nomadic Tourism Culture in Kazakhstan', *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, no 4, 2018, p. 234-247.

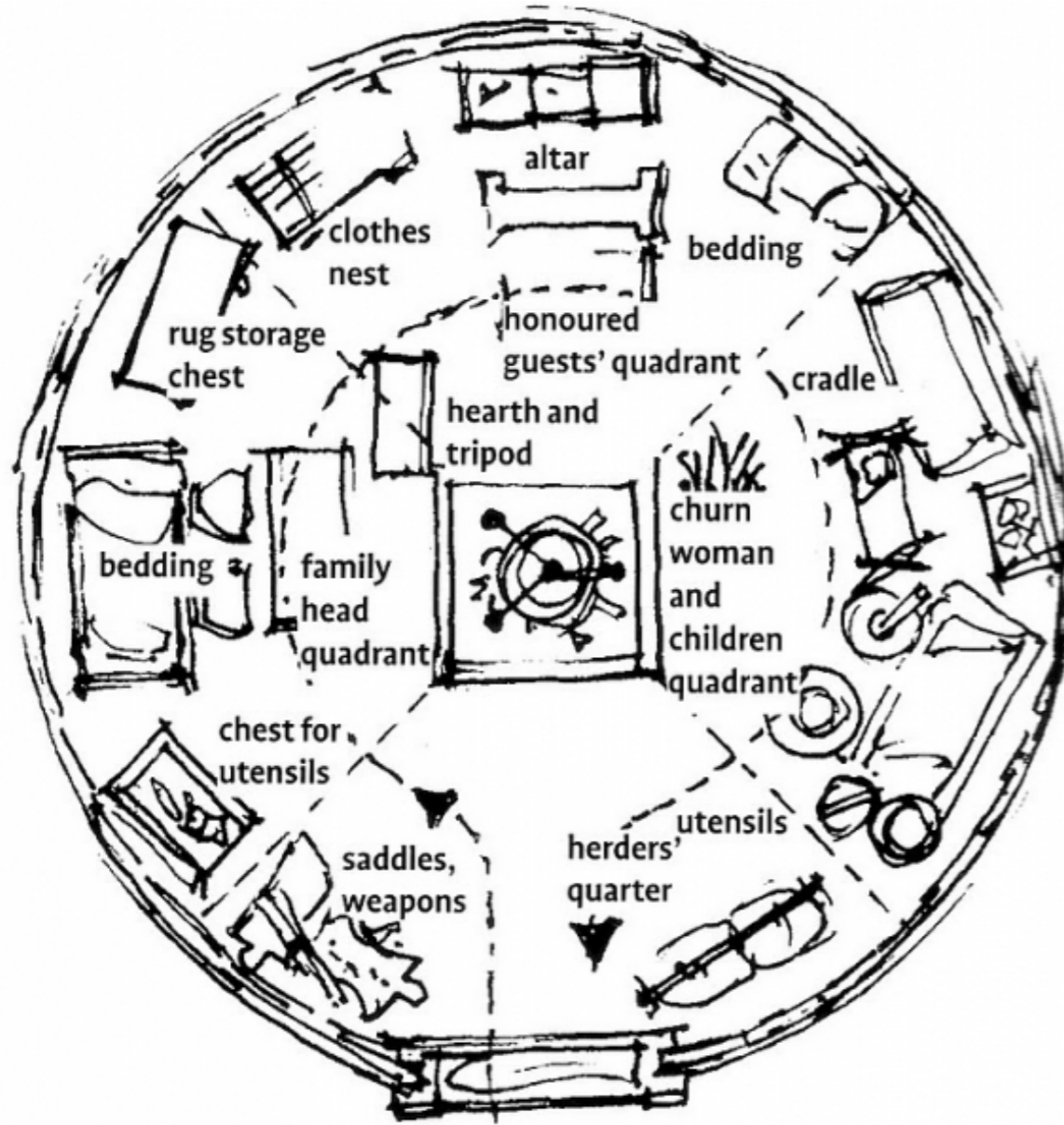


Fig 05
 Typical Plan of a Traditional Kirgыз Yurt, Oliver P., 2010

40' Yurt
 24 sections at 62.8"
 Circumference: 1508"

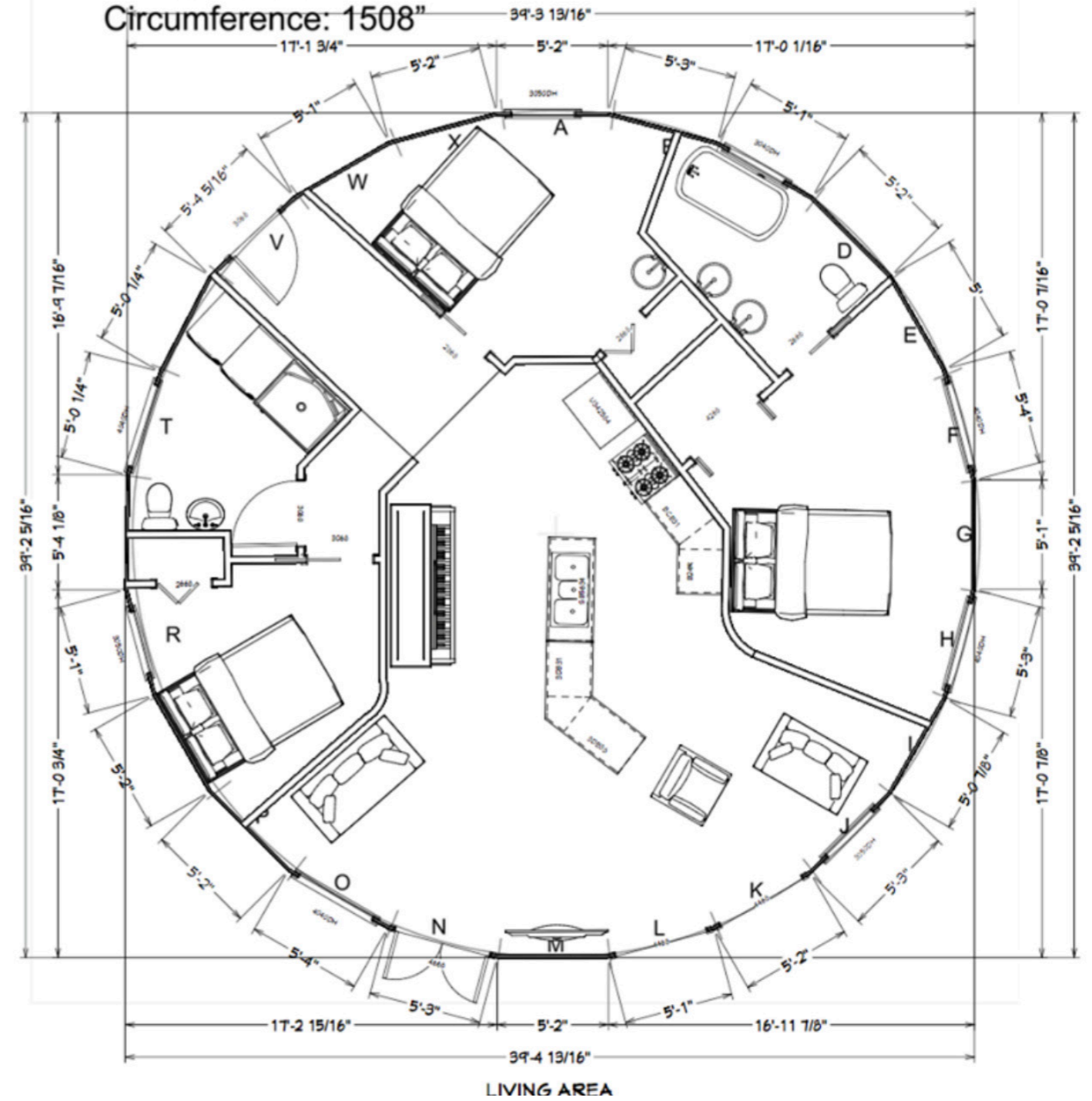


Fig 06
 Shelter Designs Yurts, Floor Plan, 2021

Chapter 02

In 2014, The UNESCO included the traditional knowledge and skills in Kazakh and Kyrgyz yurt into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The press release of the organization calls the yurt “a symbol of family and traditional hospitality, fundamental to the identity of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples.» It was submitted for inclusion into the list after passing all the necessary qualifications. The fundamental values and qualities of the yurt is what attracted UNESCO; The yurt is recognised by the community concerned as part of the cultural heritage, as well as it translates the identity and continuity of Kazakhstan, ‘Yurt creation involves the whole community of craftspeople, and fosters common human values, constructive cooperation and creative imagination. Traditionally, knowledge and skills are transmitted within families or from teachers to apprentices.’⁴

Historically, the word “yurt” didn’t refer to a dwelling, as is commonly thought now. Instead, it meant something like “camp site,” or more broadly, “community,” “people,” “existence.” To refer to an actual home, there was a separate word, *kiiz uy* in Kazakh. The word ‘yurt’ came from the word ‘zhurt’ which means ‘people’ in the Kyrgyz and Kazakh languages. Kazakhs say that people define their home, and that is what defines their existence. We question: what can be defined as the actual concept of heritage? Is it the idea, building, way of living or the people? We would think that heritage is usually acquired to something complex, grand and permanent, like mosques or churches, rather than yourts- relatively compact, mobile (temporary), and simple constructions. Yurt acquired heritage because it

⁴ “Traditional Knowledge and Skills in Making Kyrgyz and Kazakh Yurts (Turkic Nomadic Dwellings).” UNESCO, 2014, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-knowledge-and-skills-in-making-kyrgyz-and-kazakh-yurts-turkic-nomadic-dwellings-00998>.



Fig 07



Fig 08

Ministry of Culture and Information of the
Republic of Kazakhstan, 2013

is bigger than a building or an object, it gathers the community together in many different ways, starting from transporting it together, assembling and disassembling it together, living in it together.

Before erecting the yurt men work on the structure and assemble the lattice frame, women on the other hand, work on the carpentry for the protective outer layer - felt. Yurt assembly (fig. 8) is usually done by women; a group of 2-3 people can complete it in about an hour. First, a door frame is installed to which the kerege (latticework) links are attached to gradually close the circle. A typical yurt consists of six links, but wealthier families could install as many as ten. The second step involves a man standing in the center of the yurt holding a shanyrak (the dome) on a high pole. Shanyrak have a set of square holes around the rim into which the “yuk” poles are inserted—the other ends are tied to the circle of kerege. The first 3-4 poles are initially erected to secure the dome, then the rest are added around them⁵. In ancient times women also worked on the interior of the yurt, decorating the felt with traditional ornaments and creating cosiness indoors. The shanyrak is believed to be the most important part of the yurt, as it is located in the centre, connecting all the other elements of yurt; its ornament is emblematic in many Central Asian cultures. For Kazakhs, the yurt itself was frequently modified and rebuilt, but the shanyrak was passed down from father to son for centuries. A stylised version of the shanyrak crown (fig. 9) is in the center of the emblem of Kazakhstan (fig. 10), giving it even more value. There are four types of yurts that come from Central Asian cultures, and all of them have the same belief of the yurt being more than just a shelter. They are sacred places that express the way of living in close connection to nature: the floor represents earth, the roof represents sky and the shanyrak represents sun⁶.

⁵ “Kazakh Yurt.” Advantour, 2004, <https://www.advantour.com/kazakhstan/culture/yurt.htm>.

⁶ David Pearson, Circle Houses: Yurts, Tipis and Benders (The House That Jack Built). Chelsea Green, 2001, p. 98.



Fig 09
Kazakh shanyrak, the roof of the yurt the hole in the sky —
Photo, Depositsphoto



Fig 10
The state Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Shanyrak,
Buiratau

The yurt is a place where guests are always welcome, where people are immersed into Kazakh culture, traditions and customs, which makes this construction more than a piece of architecture, it gives it a human value and a reason to be a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Another considerable reason for that is sustainability; the yurt is the most genius transportable construction of ancient times, that sources local materials, requires no fabrication processes and has its unique environmental delight.

As Frei Otto points out 'When considering sustainability in vernacular architecture, one key feature refers to austerity and a wise use of materials, trying to take full advantage of their physical behaviour and reach optimal performance. There is an urge to make the most out of a limited amount of materials available'⁷. The yurt belongs to a framed tent type; Ancient Kazakhs, as I mentioned at the beginning of the essay, used local materials in the creation of yurt: round structure of easily foldable wooden lattice walls, poles and a round roof covered with canvas and felt and tightened with animal skin ropes. The yurt was present in the steppe for all of the four seasons, and having a tight envelope that will keep heat in winter and coolness in summer was crucial. The yurt's envelope was 70% felt and 30% ground. Faegre correctly points out that 'The yurt must be light enough to be carried by nomads, flexible enough to be folded and packed, and sturdy enough for multiple assembling and dismantling. Its form is very similar to a dome, a doubly curved synclastic surface enclosing maximum volume with minimum surface area, most suitable to withstand fierce winds, which flow easily around and over this aerodynamic shape'⁸.

⁷J.M. Songel, 'Sustainability Lessons From Vernacular Architecture in Frei Otto's Work: Tents and Gridshells', Universitat Politècnica de València, 2020, p. 233

⁸Torvald Faegre, The Kazak Yurt. Mimar (4), 1982, p. 50.



Fig 11

Ibn Battuta travels on a Mongol Caravan, Mohammed Dekkak

The Walls

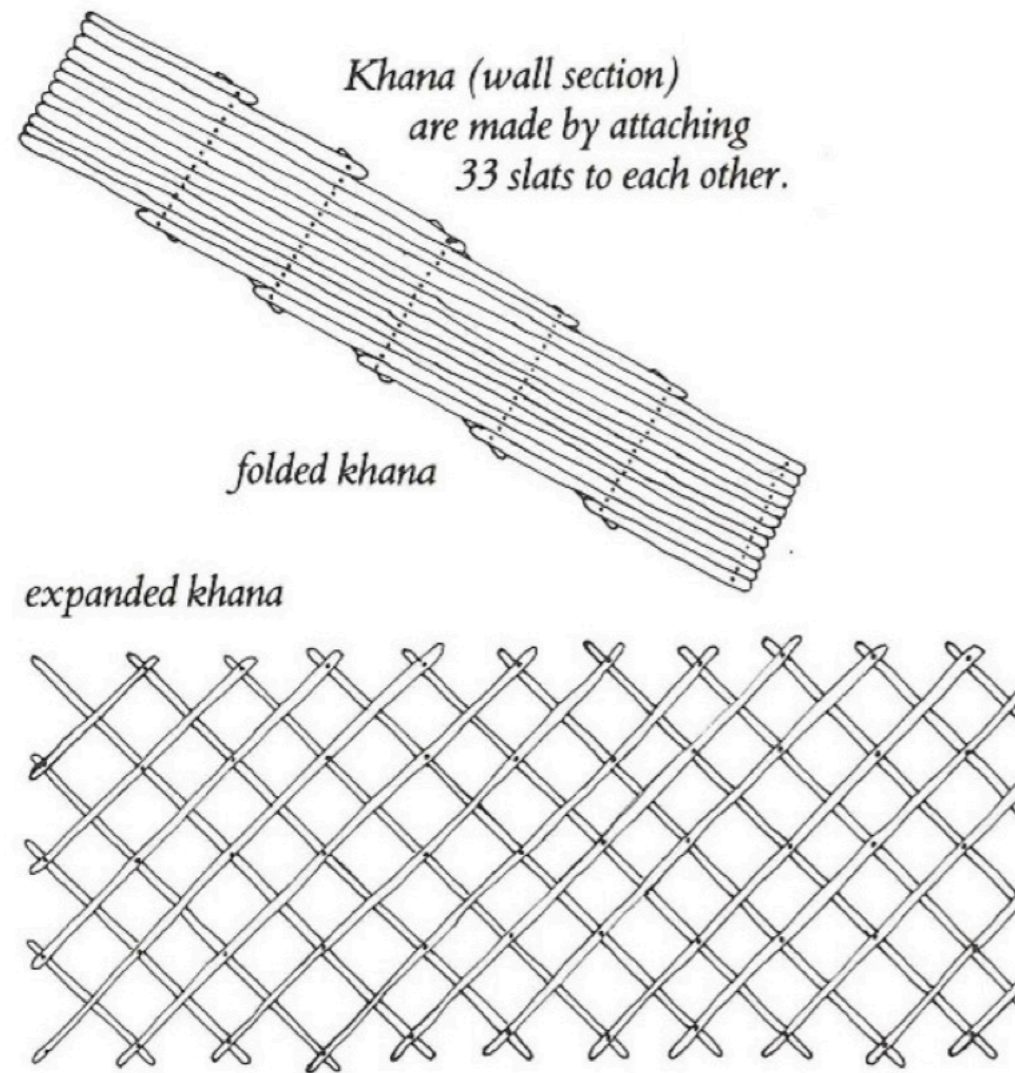


Fig 12
Yurt frame construction, Faegre, T, 1982: *The Kazak Yurt*.
Mimar

It is very important to point out the structural possibilities of the yurt offered by foldable walls; The walls of the yurt are in the shape of a cylinder, which are made up of a flexible and foldable diagonal lattice which forms a mesh when expanded (fig. 12). At each crossing of the rods there is a joint which allows easy folding and expanding. The poles however are not tied to anything, in comparison to the walls and the roof, the poles are inserted into the crown of the yurt and generate outward thrust to keep it up, that is how the yurt can withstand any compression forces created by extreme weather conditions.

The question that intrigued me the most is how can the yurt keep coolness in summer and warmth in winter if the material type and construction methods stay the same? The answer is in the dominant material of the yurt- felt. The study that was conducted on the yurt in different weather conditions by Guoqiang Xu, Hong Jin and Jian Kang in collaboration with Harbin Institute of Technology, Inner Mongolia University of Technology, and UCL Institute for Environmental Design and Engineering, shows that the felt plays a big role in the indoor thermal environment. They have studied a mongolian type yurt, which is very similar to the kazakh type, in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, with the surrounding environment close to that of actual yurts (fig. 13). The researchers looked at the external temperature, its effect on the spatial temperature distribution, change of the temperature on the inner wall surface and temperature change at the joints of the lattice wall grid. These changes were recorded over winter and transitional seasons in Mongolia. One of the main conclusions included the great change in the outside temperature between day and night in all of the seasons; the indoor temperature synchronously corresponded to the change in the outdoor temperature.

However, when the outdoor humidity was high, the indoor humidity would be drier, making the indoor temperature more comfortable for its occupants; this is due to the fact that felt is a hygroscopic material that can adjust indoor humidity when the outdoor humidity changes greatly. The low thermal inertia of the felt was the main factor that affected the indoor temperature stability. This information is specifically valuable for cold winter seasons, as they tend to get very humid, although for the warm seasons, there is another feature of the yurt that creates thermal comfort. The crown of the yurt has a circular opening (shanyrak), which is covered with felt in winter, but gets to be opened in summer. The flexibility of the opening method (can be completely covered, half opened, or completely exposed) ‘fully utilises the passive ventilation principle of wind pressure and hot pressure, creating a comfortable thermal environment in summer’⁹.



Fig 13
Yurt and its construction process, Guoqiang Xu, Hong Jin,
and Jian Kang, Inner Mongolia, 2019

⁹Guoqiang Xu, Hong Jin, and Jian Kang, 'Experimental Study on the Indoor Thermo-Hygrometric Conditions of the Mongolian Yurt', 2019, p. 4

Chapter 03

Over time, the steppes of Kazakhstan emptied; people stopped utilising yurts as homes, nomads have gradually stopped living a life on the move. Kazakh folks, however, to this day are very loyal to their own traditions and culture, for them preserving their heritage and paying homage to their ancestors is the rule they live by. When communities are made up of different ethnic groups, beliefs, cultures and social values, like in Kazakhstan, the concept of authenticity of the community, applied to cultural heritage, is particularly relevant to the country's cultural and sustainable tourism development specialists. With the concept of rapid evolvement of eco cultural tourism in the world, Kazakh industry placed their aim on visits to popular nomadic heritage sites from the times of Bronze Age, Kazakhstan has yet to establish itself as a Central Asian tourism destination, despite family accommodations and re-enactment of nomadic traditions and cultural accomplishments in rural areas. Tiberghien and Xie (2018) specified the 'neo-nomadic tourism culture' terminology used to qualify 'the new state of authenticity' of Kazakhstani cultural heritage, which has endured a steady commodification of its cultural landscapes, artefacts, and traditions for the sake of tourism development¹⁰. The neo-nomadic tourism involves the adapted to modern times use of the yurt.

This chapter will explore the authenticity of the concept of neo-nomadic culture used for the development of Kazakhstan's tourism. Talking about the authenticity, the neo-nomadic tourism, and the yurt, we should take account of the geographical perspective first, as it plays one of the most significant roles when talking about architecture; Crouch (2000) argues

¹⁰Tiberghien and Xie, 'The Life Cycle of Authenticity', p 239



Fig. 14
TWO YURTS ON THE TULIP TOUR,
Tiberghien G., MAY 2012



Fig. 15
Site of Begazy, Kyzylarai Tour,
2012

that, it is important to consider the place and space in which the object is experienced. 'A cultural landscape is a geographical area where the imprint of people and groups on the land is marked and usually comprises both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife therein.'¹¹ Landscape to nomadic residents may associate with something so usual as work or home, however for visitors it is an exciting experience and that leaves a memorable impression afterwards. Buckley et al (2008) in his study of cultural landscapes states that 'a cultural landscape is a place where the setting would not look the same without the culture, and the latter would not look the same without the landscape'¹², meaning that looking from a tourist's perspective, culture and scenery are intertwined with a person's expectations.

Local Kazakh communities strive to present traditional Kazakhstan for the purpose of neo-nomadic tourism in yurts and profit from it, by organising tours that are based on cultural landscape. In other words, Kazakhstan is using their territory as a brand for authenticity the yurt in modern world; to see how authentic modern tourism in yurts is, I am going to look at an eco tour in the south-east of Kazakhstan that involves tourism in yurts on a land of ancient nomadic civilizations.

The Kyzylarai tour (fig. 15) was founded by the members of Ecological Tourism and Public Awareness in Central Kazakhstan (ETPACK), and was one of the first community based eco tours in Central Kazakhstan¹³. The tour is based in the heart of Kazakhstan- the region of Karaganda; The area is as big as 400,000 square kilometers, and is renowned for its clean lakes, unique steppes, natural diversity and wildlife, and have always served as a

¹² Ralf Buckley, Claudia Ollenburg, and Linsheng Zhong, 'Cultural Landscape in Mongolian Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 2008, p. 35

¹³ Guillaume Tiberghien, 'Neo-nomadic Culture as a Territorial Brand for 'Authentic' Tourism Development in Kazakhstan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2020, p1728-1751,

landmark for travellers along the Silk Road, serving as a place to stop and rest. The Kyzylarai tour includes Bronze Age archaeological sites as well as historic sites associated with nomadic culture, adding to the authenticity of nomadic Kazakhstan. Tourists start their three day long journey in the city of Karaganda, from where they are taken to Aktogai region (4 hour drive from the initial location) to visit the local ethnographic places. Afterwards they proceed to an eco village of Shaban Bai Bi, where tourists are welcomed into their yurts that are installed and equipped with beds, instead of traditional korpes (thin felt mattresses) (fig. 16) , along with showers and toilets. Local community of Shaban Bai Bi preserved their traditional skills of food making, in particular nomadic food specialities, which includes dishes made out of horse meat and camel milk, which opens opportunities for visitors to get fully immersed into the customs of Kazakhstan (fig.17).

Figure 18 depicts the Kyzylarai tour's homestay provider sitting in front of a carpet that decorates the wall in her living room, which is ornamented in a traditional Kazakh way. Additionally, homestay providers offered tourists an opportunity to make their own felt crafts either done in a traditional way or in a new style. The decorations of such ornaments add to the authentic experience of the tourists however does not fully translate it as much as other contributions to the yurt such as the process of transporting and erecting the yurt together.

To understand the authenticity of the Kyzylarai tourism experience and to find out if camping yurts translate heritage, the researchers from the Kazakh KIMEP University have interviewed tourists who attended this tour. The traditional nomadic culture associated with mobility, assembly and disassembly of the yurt to the majority of the tourists who participated in the trial.



*Fig 16.
The Kazakh national bed korpe is drying near the yurt,
Konstantinov V.*



*Fig. 17
A TRADITIONAL TABLE FILLED WITH DISHES (DASTARKHAN)
IN THE VILLAGE OF SHABANBAI BI, CENTRAL KAZAKHSTAN,
KYZYLARAI TOUR, Tiberghien G. November, 2013*



Fig. 18
HOMESTAY PROVIDER AND KAZAKH CARPET,
KYZYLARAI TOUR, Tiberghien G. AUGUST 2011

Two of the rest of the tourist group have identified that the landscape majorly contributed to the nomadic way of life; The explanation included the fact that real nomads are always on the move and do not have a definite place to live in¹⁴, although, they have a stability in their housing construction (yurt) that becomes a part of the landscape.

In contrast, less than a half of visitors commented that the traditional culture of Kazakhstan has completely changed and even disappeared. They stated that local communities that were formerly nomads completely changed their way of living by no longer living in yurts and moving into towns and villages. Moreover, they did not believe in the authenticity of neo nomadic tourism and stated that camping in a yurt does not translate heritage as a lot of unique characteristics like moving it from one place to another, setting it up together, sleeping on the floor have disappeared. The traditions became more Westernised to satisfy the needs and social norms of tourists coming from Western countries, 'Kazakhstani people do not forget their traditions but rather reinvent them with the modernisation of the country'¹⁵. The commercialisation of the formerly nomadic culture was primarily made up for the purposes of tourism, which depended on such commercial exploitation of the nomadic traditions and acted as a pivot for the survival of the tourism industry in the country.

¹⁴ Tiberghien, 'Neo-nomadic Culture as a Territorial Brand for 'Authentic' Tourism Development in Kazakhstan', p 1735

¹⁵ Tiberghien, 'Neo-nomadic Culture as a Territorial Brand for 'Authentic' Tourism Development in Kazakhstan', p 1735

Conclusion

The Kazakh yurt has been both my pride and my curiosity; My pride because it comprises everything that Kazakh culture is- hospitality, community, and a unique relationship with nature. On the other hand, the feeling of curiosity derives from the fact that it influenced our lives in so many drastic ways, however we do not utilise it or celebrate it as much anymore, and the question is 'why'? By completing the indepth research into yurt as something more than a construction- a piece of heritage, I understood the complete meaning and value of it. The other thing that I understood and concluded is that the yurt will always be a heritage to us, although it will never be as authentic as it was, and a lot of people, including me, who get introduced to the modern yurt would not be able to experience the true nature of it.

I chose to write this dissertation on the hereditary values of the yurt because I wanted to research a number of things. First, we know how a yurt looks, but what is a yurt and what does it actually mean? Second, how did something as temporary and small as a yurt become a UNESCO heritage? Thirdly, what is the main output of it in the modern world? This curiosity developed from the small majority of Westernised society's image of Kazakhstan, the image that comprises of us majorly utilising yurts to this day; This thought made me wonder where did the yurts go, this contrast between them being the only major construction before the 1920s to disappearing 100 years later. Living in the modernised city, I do not see yurts at all, however if there is a traditional celebration or a tourist site (usually outside the city) yurts become the focus of attention.

The idea of the community gathering and dining together in the yurt is distinctly present in modern Kazakhstan, however the lack of authenticity

of the nomadic experience of mobility, locally sourced materials, indoor layout, and some aspects of sustainability have disappeared. The ground of spacious steppes are no longer utilised by the whole society, but only by tourists. The Kazakh steppes reflect a long history of human interaction with the environment; tourists interviewed for this study saw the cultural landscapes not just as a source of authentic tourism experiences, but also as an attribute of their tours that remained stagnant and objectively authentic. The research discussed in the last chapter showcases visitors of the Kyzylarai tour that construct and define notions of wilderness through a Western lens. According to one point of view, commodification and commercialization only provide a partial picture of a tourist destination (Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Cole, 2007). The various ways in which the Kazakh government wishes to shape the revival of nomadic culture for the purposes of tourism development raises important questions for local communities¹⁶: What aspects of the former nomadic culture would locals like to symbolise as authentic tourism products for visitors? The images of authenticity introduced to tourists have substantial ethical implications for locals. According to Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 120), «this emphasis on local exoticism can lead to the invention of traditions to satisfy external definitions of what is genuine¹⁷.» As Smith and Duffy mention:

Clearly, there are limits to the degree to which 'reality' can be negotiated, but these limits will vary for different social groups with different agendas. Authenticity becomes an issue for tourists only when their expectations are unmet or their desires unfulfilled.

Smith and Duffy (2003)

¹⁶ Paul Cloke and Harvey C Perkins, 'Commodification and adventure in New Zealand tourism. Current Issues in Tourism', 2002, pp. 521–54

¹⁷ Mick Smith and Rosaline Duffy, 'The ethics of tourism development' (2nd ed.), London: Sage Publications, 2003, p133

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