

## ИСКУССТВОВЕДЕНИЕ

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### **KALMYK ART: LOCAL STYLE OF THE BUDDHIST ICONOGRAFY**

*The materials on the History of Buddhism in Kalmykia expand the research into specifically Buddhist art represented by the work of author S.G. Batyreva. There is distinctive spirituality with its own nature in the canonic figures dating back to Tibetan artistic tradition. Local style of the old-Kalmyk art is manifested both in individual formal details of the image in the figures overall aesthetic interpretation expressing the groups' worldview. The canonization of folklore characters followed by the introduction of brands, symbolic attributes and the appearance of emphasized symmetrical frontal composition is particularly noticeable in the initial stage of the assimilation of Buddhism. Generally in Kalmyk tradition laconic, poorly developed (in terms of the plot) symmetric scenes prevail, expressing tendency to the emphasized personification of the main character, which is the icon's center and the object of worship for believers.*

Keywords: *kalmyks, traditional culture, art, buddhist iconography, canon, local style.*

### **The pre-Buddhist origin of Kalmyk Art**

The materials on the History of Buddhism in Kalmykia expand the research into specifically Buddhist art represented by the work of author S.G. Batyreva [1. P. 30]. The problem of style formation is studied here, in the first historic- cultural reconstruction of Buddhist art in Kalmykia undertaken by the author. Iconographic questions are an important part of the overall problematic of art criticism. The author collected some interesting and extensive material in Kalmykia, Buryatia and Mongolia for the analysis of the pieces of art.

The absence of multi-figure compositions is typical (to illustrate, for example, the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and other main doctrine characters). The composition of Kalmyk pantheon reflecting ethnic uniqueness is constituent, an important role is played by the so-called “*secondary images*” (canonized local deities). The pre-Buddhist archaic of the attitude (world perception) is synthesized in them, which is canonized in iconography. It is important to denote that all Mongolian peoples have the image of the sitting White Oldman. There are many variations of the image in iconography; hence it has so many names in Kalmykia and Western Mongolia – Delken Tsagan Ovgn, Uulin Tsagan Aav, Tsastyn Tsagan Aav. The connecting link is “Tsagan” (kalm. “white, firstborn, maternal” the definition fixing attention on traditional symbolism of the white color as the original fundamental in the artistic culture of the nomads. Western Mongolian expeditional material makes it possible to experience the living and drifting to the ancient pre-Buddhist rituals traditional birth of iconography of this and other not half “*secondary*” to the peoples' perception of pantheon characters [2].

The thesis reveals a unique Kalmyk version of the standing White Oldman presenting the archetypal foundation of the Nature cult that was found not in Buryatia or Mongolia, but presented in private collections and museum collections in Kalmykia [3]. The studied museum collections of Ulan-Ude, Kyakhta, Ulaanbaatar and Khovd allow us to assert the uniqueness of this iconographic variant and its absence outside the current range of the Kalmyks' settlement. The research of the art critic S. Batchulun (Mongolia) devoted to the iconography of figures in the art of Mongolian peoples, confirm the author's hypothesis about the local origin of the image of the standing White Oldman [4].

The comparative analysis shows that the genesis of a male character can be traced in Mongolian and Buryat art, but the final iconographic variant of the "standing" image was formed in the Eurasian space in Kalmykia and represents a relic of ancient tradition. The popularity of this image (figure) in Buddhist painting and sculpture is explained by ritual peculiarities of its perception not as an ordinary patriarchal and patron of local areas, but as the patron of all Kalmyk people due to its dated existence away from traditional centers of Central Asian culture. The severe and imperious image of Tsagan Aav captures the beginning of Kalmykia's local Buddhist art (in the 18th and first half of the 19th century) [5. P 57–64]. Apprehended from folk artistic craft decorative art defines the specific of the mature style of art. The analysis of the aesthetic features of iconic works is impossible without the recourse to Kalmyk applied arts' experience; the sphere of its traditional influence has considerably determined characteristic features of the local artistic style.

The relationships indicate to the integrity of Kalmyk art, its artistic and imaginative (figurative) unity, so that the language of folk decorative and applied art can serve as the key to understanding Kalmyk Buddhist fine art. It seems appropriable to designate its stylistic originality as "*archaic laconism*". The features of an artistic image are the symmetric three-tiered composition centered as a rule by the main character; accentuation of shape with a contour line; decorative art of the works' "warm" coloring and the stylized (ornamented) interpretation of landscape and details of the undeveloped plotline of the image in the attempt of the artistic images' personification [6. P. 382–390].

### **The image of the standing White Oldman**

A strictly monumental disposition of the image is approved in the religious frontal depiction of the composition. The majestic guise of the standing White Oldman expresses the understanding of "*cosmos as a subject*" which allows the anthropomorphic interpretation of nature and allows its assimilation to a person. The analysis of the artworks shows that in Kalmyk fine arts whether decor of household items or iconography the aesthetic beauty ideal is traceable gravitating to the symbolic identity of good and beauty, generalized in the human's image identified with nature itself. The tier structure of the iconic space is marked vertically with the character's figure, whose head "goes up" to the sky and with the feet resting on the ground. In the icon, synthesizing early (pre-Buddhist) and Buddhist concepts, the spatial system of interrelations (Earth – Human – Heaven) determines the central place of the human-mediator. The combination of chronologically diverse views in old Kalmyk art not only establishes the local variation of ethic-aesthetic concepts in traditional culture, but also testifies to the ongoing process of the ethnic artistic experience's generalization.

Emphasized laconism of the figurative system, means and techniques of artistic expression are perceived by the integral core of the Kalmyk image. Missing in the steppe landscape, mountains are necessarily depicted in the icon's landscape background, having a deep symbolic value (their archaic meaning dates back to the "Nature" cult) but the anthropomorphism expressed in iconography is perceived by the embodiment of the peoples' figurative memory "encoded" in the canonical plot.

The composition's vertical axis is accentuated by the tall hairdo of the Oldman that has a "vajra" form ("thunderstone", sign of strength, symbolic weapon of Buddhist pantheon deities); he is holding a stick with a dragon head (the symbol of the water element, life-giving to the arid Kalmyk steppe). The complex of features represents the key to understanding the symbolic expressiveness of the figure, who is the patron of hearth and home, clan, terrain. The archaic vertical of the "axis of the universe" dominates in artworks that are meant to fulfill, strengthen and maintain the traditional Mountain cult (adapted to the plains) and areal master, developed in the pre-Buddhist ceremonies of Western Mongols and Kalmyks.

### **The Old-Kalmyk Art: tradition and novation**

Structurally-functional analysis realized in the research testifies to the important role of natural environment in Kalmyk art. In the independent, isolated from Buddhist centers development expressing the ethnic groups' aspiration towards self-identification by means of art the origin of stylistic integrity should be looked for. Dominants of local aesthetics revealed in the thesis characterize the artistic style of artworks reproduced in tradition; in conditions that are generally critical for its existence. The canonization line of images of pre-Buddhist origin creates the emergence of the conditional portrait in fine arts. The genesis of genre should be attributed not only to the image of the White Oldman, but to others, related to the ancient ancestral cult as well. Such are the portraits of the Kalmyk progenitors combining the myth-poetic essence of space-time in artistic treatment, typical for nomadic culture. Style development in Kalmyk fine arts occurs with alternant prevalence of innovation and tradition thus fixating the coexistence of various cultural layers. The emergence of "the tradition's relicts" creates a new quality of the canonized form, preserving the archaic ancestral layer of world vision in the ancestral cult, in cults of ancestral patrons, and patriarchs of this or that ethnic group.

Under the influence of the dominant stabilizing trend (tradition) shown in the study, "complemented and compensated by the variable form of creativity" (novation) according to B. Bernstein the emergence of the portrait genre in cult arts occurred [7. P. 112–153]. Iconographic images of ancestors are still kept by the Oldman in the Kalmyk family symbolizing the succession fact of spiritual culture. Images of local origin were entered into the iconographic scheme of Buddhist canons which identified its development in artistic tradition. On the one hand the more stable ethnic features in conditional portraits were selected; on the other hand a renewal of Buddhist pantheon occurred due to the introduction of new local characters of pre-Buddhist origin. The scale of colors of the artworks dates back to the symbolic of ethnical world vision, making the spectrum into a warm polychrome of painting, sculpture and applied arts. The decorative style is revealed in artworks created using traditional methods, where the black linear "frame" develops in the abundance of vivid and tonal color design. Attraction towards the treatment of embroidered

iconographic images or applied, picturesque or sculptural is designated by the term “*zertegar kerulh*” (decorate with patterns) typical for Kalmyk applied art.

Ethnic tradition breathed new life into the iconic Buddhist canon: The unique charm of the folk's artistic taste is manifested in grace in lined stitching and in the bright color applique, contoured with a colored lace, in the iconography of the extant monumental canvases of the 19th and early 20th centuries: Buddha Shakyamuni (Gautama Buddha) and the Green Tara. The original form of artwork demonstrates the figurative and stylistic unity of folk crafts and Buddhist fine art. Kalmyk painting technique in the 19th–20th centuries was based on using not only numeral, but also vegetative dyes, which were more prone to fracture according to folk artists. The common practice of the local painters to write a prayer text vertically on the artwork's back, using the old-Kalmyk writing “*todo bichig*” (the synonym used for its designation “*amd uzg*” in figurative translation from the Kalmyk language, captures uniquely the vertical ligature of the alphabetic letters “*living letter*”, comparable to the figure of the standing man in folklore).

### **Ethnic specificity of Buddhist iconography**

The cultural assimilation (acculturation) of Buddhist art has caused the withdrawal from iconographic convention of the religious canon. The line of de-canonicalization is traceable not only in artistic treatment of local characters, but in images of the classical Buddha and Bodhisattvas, Idams and Teachers of the pantheon. Icons from the KalmNC RAN museum, designed in “floral” style, are characterized by the introduction of steppe landscape elements in painting depicted during tulips blossoming period. The canonical detachment of the classical Buddhist images is replaced by a sensitively designated or seriously concentrated facial expression with a big, round eyed face and a broad nose in local interpretation. D. Ivanov, the keeper of the Mongolian and Tibetan collections in Kunstkammer sees the uniqueness of Kalmyk art in the ethnic specificity of their facial depiction. After tracing down the history of one of the museum's works of art from the collection, he identified the place of origin indicating to the Volga Ulus of the 19th century populated with Astrakhan Kalmyks. The researcher pointed out the unique identity of old-Kalmyk painting as an unordinary style, relying on the author's observations (studies), published in old-Kalmyk art literature [8. P. 40–47].

At the same time, there is no reason to talk about the style of such artworks, reducible to detailed interpretation of steppe landscape or the character's ethnic image “*violating*” the canon of artistic form. In this case, it might be about the stylization, inevitable in the conditions of common degradation of canonic tradition and the formation of a local painting school. The “*naivety*” of this art is akin to the phenomenon of “*people*” painting.

The Kalmyk Burkhangs' artistic solution naturally gravitates to the cheerful coloring of the “*zeg*” ornament, simply introduced into the apparel's decor of Lama's sculptural image and into the coloration of the lotus pedestal and the depiction of flowers in the conditional landscape of iconographic artworks. Ornamenting is a typical phenomenon in Buddhist fine art in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, style formation in Kalmyk art consistently passes stages of expressed canonization, of formed style and its folklorization. The syncretism of Kalmyk iconography and sculpture marked with explicit local originality has reflected impacts of applied arts, traditional being and of the natural landscape. The capacious characteristic of

iconographic images is the result of a long development of the people's ethic-aesthetic views, a generalization of artistic experience, abstraction and shaping-creative processes, which found expression in figurative symbolism and decorative interrelation of cult artworks.

In the conclusion, the thesis draws an inference about the relevance of studying the unit of concepts "*art – culture – tradition*" as a single sense-forming system, allowing to reconstruct lost fragments of Kalmyk fine arts in the 19th and early 20th centuries and to restore the logic of the artistic process. The traditional myth-poetic essence of Kalmyk culture is defined by the substratum in the thesis, justifying the genesis of its kinds in historical dynamics.

The identification of the aesthetic code embedded in standard categories of the world's ethnic picture, leads to understanding artistic tradition as a fundamental factor of cultural succession. Growing out of the archaic prototype ("*the collective unconscious*"), tradition unites culture and art, motivates internal relations among various types, plays a protective and energy saving role in extreme circumstances and, thus determines the stability of the society. In art understanding tradition is associated with the concepts of archetype and cultural stereotype caused by the adaptation to influences of external environment [9. P. 175–177]. The correction of the phenomena "Nature-Human" is realized in the artistic practice of the ethnos characterizing Kalmyk cultural landscape. This is demonstrated by the example of the White Oldman's image (*Tsagan Ovgn*), embracing the carriers archetypal in its sense world outlook of local culture. During the development of Kalmyk art, the apprehended Buddhist iconic canon secured the myth-poetic layer of artistic tradition signifying the maturation stage of local culture. A qualitatively different developmental stage, acquired by culture in the process of the ethnic groups' initiation to Buddhism, is projected (interdependent) in the society's transition from a nomadic to settled way of life. Innovation in art (iconographic canon in this case) merged in the mythical "*archetype*" of tradition giving it impulse for further development. Not only fine art, but also decorative and applied art, which in the synthesis of artistic means gave Unique patterns of Kalmyk Buddhist art, was implicated into the process of the studied time period.

The concrete principle of space organization remaining in art has caused a "*recurrent*" movement of culture where it is necessary to find sources of stylistic integrity of old and modern Kalmyk art [10. P. 6–23].

The ethnic consciousness of the people who call themselves "*Ulan zalata khalmgud*" accentuated the sacral significance of traditional headwear with its decorative red tassel "*zala*", symbolizing the sun. Having obvious similarities with headwears of other Mongolian peoples it is important to denote that for Kalmyks this particular attribute with its shape and color becomes an aesthetic expression of ethnic identity in foreign cultural environment. Tendencies of returning culture to its "*sacral center*" of its sources in the studied time period were demonstrated in its own fashion in the Buddhist culture of Mongolian and Central Asian peoples as a whole. However, in Kalmyk culture (especially in Buddhist images) the "*cyclic*" paradigm of the nomadic world perception was visually and symbolically overcome due to the vertical "*movement*", which explicitly embodied the idea of ascension from Earth to Heaven (Sky).

Such is the paradigm of art which has closed the circle of archetypal thought and has continued and transformed it into spirals of further development in space

of the common sources of traditional culture of Mongol people. The form-shaping core in art was the figurative and constructive thought of the ethnos which operates with a sense of rhythm proportion, knowledge about tectonics and plasticity of space. It is vividly realized in the identity approval of macro and microcosm. The massive model of the World should be recognized as the code of its plastic decipher, which has created the Universe of traditional culture, reproduced in architectural space, in artworks of folk decorative and applied and Buddhist fine art.

The experience of the reconstruction of Kalmyk fine art allows asserting that the archetype of consciousness that is reproduced in the culture's historic genesis is traced in situations that are critical for the existence of artistic tradition and thus determines its potential and ability of self-preservation. Art as a holistic artistic phenomenon in the interdependent developmental process of folk and Buddhist art is secured by the system of norms and values of traditional culture. Performed by expressive means the world perception is a decorative style of art passing in the development stages of formation, mature style and Buddhist iconographic stylization. It is explained in the thesis by interdependent relations of *canonization* and *folklorization*, alternately prevailing in the artistic process. The people's myth-poetic consciousness (in echoes of traditional rituals and patriarchal and communal relations, reflecting the structure of nomadic feudalism) transforms and spiritualizes art in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The thesis about the uniqueness of the artworks' aesthetic expression is proved in the study of the Kalmyk fine art, considered as a folk art product on the hand and as Buddhism on the other hand. Principles of "*reciprocity*" and "*equivalence*" determined the dynamics and the direction of arts' development in a combination of linear (dynamic) and concentric (static) movement, building up logic of art development in the cultural system. The cyclic nature of art realized in the regeneration of archaic consciousness, forming a traditional character in its original version of myth-poetic unity of time and space is at the same time connected with the linearity of its progressive development as a whole. In the dynamics of the linear and magical statics of "*returning to the archetype*" the artistic process in the spiritual concept of art development in the space of traditional culture is considered.

## Conclusions

The development of Kalmyk fine art has its own rhythm in the partitioning of space-time, associated with the notion of the path (way) as the essence of life. It was reflected in the symbolism of the folk ornament "*zeg*", which means a "*step*", the distance traversed by a person or a society during their lifetime. In the study of the artistic process this is correlated with the vertical of the movement, projected from the archetypal traditional hearth up to the sky. The transformation of the cyclic development is demonstrated here. The human and its body come forth as the center of the world model, (that is) recreated in iconography. In the given form of ecologic identity of human and nature clearly visible in "*mature style*" artworks, the author sees the end result (bottom line) of Kalmyk fine art's development in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with the peoples' worldview expanding [11. P. 81–83]. The thesis demonstrates how the myth-poetic artistic tradition of the ancestral-tribal society continues to live in canonical art, defining its ethnical originality, and ultimately its stylistic maturity formed in the harmonic interaction of tradition and innovation.

The mechanism of cyclic recurrence as a form of cultural development programs the content of art during the transition period. At the same time, guarded by artistic tradition, art reveals relative independence of linear growth in the general cultural context of development. The undertaken attempt of a historic-cultural reconstruction of Kalmyk fine art of the 19th and early 20th centuries, approved in the expositional museum praxis, allows making following conclusions:

- Art is a historical process of form-shaping, where the structure and function of the artwork's artistic image are conjugated with space and time categories, expressing the ethnic group's world perception;
- the figurative system of folk ornament, which concentrated the historical rhythm of the nomadic being in the archetypal form of meander “zeg”, is marked by the spatio-temporal parameters of the myth-poetic attitude;
- the myth-poetic image (portrait) of the world, projected in spatial parameters of decorative and applied arts (arts and crafts), transforms into a Buddhist world model with expressive means of architecture, painting and sculpture in Buddhism, allowing to differentiate the archaic pre-Buddhist and religious aspects of the artistic tradition's being in the genesis of ethnic worldview;
- Old-Kalmyk art historically formed in the synthesis of Buddhist iconic canon and artistic tradition is a local phenomenon of Northern Buddhist art, marked by its original artistic style;
- traditional worldview as a figurative ancestral memory, reproduced in Kalmykia's fine art serves as a stabilizing “constant” of cultural development providing the integrative process of succession of the historical process;
- tradition as a collective-genesis creation comprises a uniform figurative system of art, embracing forms from various origination stages interdependent in the evolution of the peoples' artistic culture;
- Kalmyk fine art of the 19th and early 20th centuries is a self-organizing cultural subsystem, preserving tradition as a specific informative code in ethnical culture in the cyclic process of spiral development, allowing determining it as a traditional hence, and cultural heritage of Kalmykia.

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In this paper I study the materials on the History of Buddhism in Kalmykia expand the research into specifically Buddhist art. There is distinctive spirituality with its own nature in the canonic figures dating back to Tibetan artistic tradition. Local style of the old-Kalmyk art is manifested both in individual formal details of the image in the figures overall aesthetic interpretation expressing the groups' worldview. The canonization of folklore characters followed by the introduction of brands, symbolic attributes and the appearance of emphasized symmetrical frontal composition is particularly noticeable in the initial stage of the assimilation of Buddhism. Generally in Kalmyk tradition laconic, poorly developed (in terms of the plot) symmetric scenes prevail, expressing tendency to the emphasized personification of the main character, which is the icon's center and the object of worship for believers.

The archetypal core of iconography in the structure of Buddhist fine art in Kalmykia, the folks' figurative world vision embraces the manifestation of its local features. Buddhist artistic style in Kalmykia demonstrates how in Kalmyk folk culture the development of Buddhist iconic canon occurs. Interdependent in the artistic process canonical and folklore trends form arts ethnical features that is analyzed as a historically determinate way of viewing and organizing the world. Folklorization generally accompanied the process of Buddhist art ethnization.

The basis of the Old Kalmyk art, emerging, emerging and developing, is the mechanism of interaction between the visual canon of Buddhism and the artistic traditions of ethnic culture. In the structure of culture, it is important to single out its interdependent layers: spiritual, closely related to the pre-Buddhist worldview and material, conditioned by the nomadic way of life. The historical process of interaction of innovation, which was perceived iconographic canon, and the traditions of the people is marked by the phasing of an ethnic culture capable of self-regulation in development. The phenomenon of its self-preservation is realized in the reproduction of the traditional interrelations of man, society and nature. The latter is expressed in the phenomena of style formation and stylization of the fine art of Kalmykia.

The fate of the canon of Buddhism in ethnic culture is originally framed in the system of spatial mapping of the world – expressive means of architecture, painting and plastics, decorative and applied arts. In the process of artistic world modeling, a local school of easel painting and sculpture at Kalmyk temples is taking shape. The iconographic tradition of Buddhism feeds the addition of "its" pantheon in the appearance of images of pre-Buddhist origin, canonized by religion. The multiplicity of the pantheon is largely due to the polyethnic composition of the environment in which the doctrine became widespread. In Kalmyk iconography, phenomena of transformation of the perceived canon are observed. This occurs in the introduction to the image of elements of the local landscape, the ethnic features of the external appearance of images and attributes from the real environment, the originality of color plastic, as well as in the localization of the compositional structure of the works. Metamorphosis of the artistic form accompanies the process of style formation that takes place within the iconographic canon of Buddhism.