

Bakhytzhan Kamalkhanovich SHILDERKHANOV, Nessipbek Zhunusbekovich
ISSAKHOV, Yuriy Griqorievich POPOV, Saltanat Torekulovna
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TROFIMOV, Dina Abilmazhinovna AMANDYKOVA

Compositional Features of Ethnic Interior Design

Bakhytzhan Kamalkhanovich SHILDERKHANOV, Nessipbek Zhunusbekovich
ISSAKHOV, Yuriy Griqorievich POPOV, Saltanat Torekulovna
MYRZAHMETOVA, Alexandra Alexandrovna KOSTSOVA, Viktor Petrovich
TROFIMOV, Dina Abilmazhinovna AMANDYKOVA

T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Almaty, Republic of
Kazakhstan

A. Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Republic of Kazakhstan
Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering (KAZGASA),
Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Construction, Almaty, Republic of
Kazakhstan

Abstract. *This article briefly outlines the influence of "oralmen" ("returnees") on the development of contemporary Kazakh decorative and applied arts. It deals with the folk tradition that requires special spatial solutions and specific arrangements. In addition, the article compares the compositions of historic and modern residential interiors to define the compositional features of living space.*

The turn to cultural and historical heritage has become a recent popular trend in interior design. Various ethnic elements and motifs adorn the collections of famous fashion designers, interiors and exteriors of residential and public buildings. In Kazakhstan, the interest to traditional forms revived because of many social phenomena, as the epoch and society shape architecture. Material cultural objects convey and represent the mentality of an ethnic group – a collective mental system formed in society, presented to all members of this society and manifested at the individual level. As part of the study, we analyzed a number of works devoted to the ethnographic features of the Kazakhs coming from different countries. Traditional Kazakh applied arts capture and reflect the spirit and uniqueness of ethnic culture. The study of the ethnic composition of living space determined the temporary changes in interior design in the process of observing customs and traditions such as birth, weddings, etc. National identity is represented in ethnic design through references to historical heritage. Modern Kazakh designers turn to ethno-cultural motifs in their work with social responsibility. Prior to planning, they usually conduct cultural, ethnographic, and linguistic studies of ethnic heritage.

Keywords: ethnic style, traditional culture, interior composition.

The on-going social changes complicate and expand the functions of living space with putting emphasis on the role of residential space for the spiritual and creative development of the individual. The turn to cultural and historical heritage has become a recent popular trend in interior design. Various ethnic elements and motifs adorn the collections of famous fashion designers, interiors and exteriors of residential and public buildings. Except for fashion, there are other objective reasons why ethnocultural motifs become prominent in contemporary design. The list includes the interest in eco-friendly food products; traditional production technology; ethnic branding of industrial goods; design of national cultural products; advertising and promotion of tourist business; design of symbols for

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national cultural events, as well as representation of the country on the international arena (exhibition, sports, economic, political and cultural events)¹.

In Kazakhstan, the interest to traditional forms revived because of many social phenomena, as the epoch and society shape architecture. A historic tradition, as a full-fledged element of culture, is manifested in architecture and design in easily recognizable forms. "Images of the past" continue to play a special role in the representation of the canons of the past. Based on folk traditional art, ethnic style permeates many creative aspects as a way to express national identity:

*"The artist with ethnic consciousness projects his or her vision of the world in the language of an ethnic artistic tradition (with its figurative plot, composition and color scheme), in contrast to other artists who create in a radically different manner. While examining the objects of folk art, we come into contact with ethnic creativity, not with a separate creative person"*².

Material cultural objects convey and represent the mentality of an ethnic group – a collective mental system formed in society, presented to all members of this society and manifested at the individual level. National mentality serves as a guideline for the "learned behavior", including skills and habits instilled by bringing up and education, etc.

The rise of ethnic style in Kazakhstan owns to the influence of *oralmen*. An *oralman* means a "returnee" in the Kazakh language. The term defines ethnic Kazakh immigrants who moved to Kazakhstan from neighboring countries, namely Uzbekistan, China, Turkmenistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, as well as other Asian countries such as Mongolia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and others. According to the recent reports, more than 1 million people immigrated to Kazakhstan over the last 25 years.

*Belonging to the Kazakh diaspora, oralmen preserved certain aspects of Kazakh culture, traditions and lifestyle. Most of oralmen from non-CIS countries are religious: they follow certain manners, dressing styles and family roles. Women wear traditional clothes, consisting of a dress with a high collar worn with a jacket. They also cover their head with a scarf. Men who came from Uzbekistan wear skullcaps, while those from Iran and Pakistan wear turbans. There are a number of differences in the daily life of oralmen and the local Kazakh population. Many oralmen do not buy furniture, as they use korpe, hand-made quilts, pillows and carpets. During the meal, they sit at low tables*³.

As part of the study, we analyzed a number of works devoted to the ethnographic features of the Kazakhs coming from different countries. Special attention was given to the works of A. T. Toleubayev and D. Eskekbayev who studied the traditional culture of the Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan in general and in Dambarovo, Sna and Adamov districts of the Orenburg region of the

¹ D.G. Chernykh, *Russian graphic ethnodesign in the 20th-21st century*. Architecton: Proceedings of Higher Education, 2014, 45, 203-210. Available: http://archvuz.ru/2014_1/19, accessed 12. 03. 2018.

² N. Zh. Shakhanova, *The world of traditional Kazakh culture*, Almaty, 1998.

³ S. I. Sadybekov, *Comparative phraseological units in national metrology*, News of NAS RK, 2010, p. 5.

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RSFSR in particular⁴. Historical records mention the Kazakhs coming to that territory in the 17th century. The settlements continued with some interruptions in later centuries and the last mass migration of the Kazakhs to this region took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Ethnographers A. T. Toleubayev and D. Eskekbayev described some features of the interior residential design of the Kazakhs in the Orenburg region. It includes a mandatory *tapchan* in the kitchen, which occupies approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the room.

The Kazakhs usually eat while sitting on the tapchan around the dastarkhan (a tablecloth used during meals). However, such a traditional dwelling as a yurt is completely gone from everyday life: even shepherds do not use it. The Orenburg Kazakhs have a special feature: very often there is a samovar in the kitchen, widely used by each local Kazakh family. The hostess takes a tray with cups and pours tea, then places the tray to the center of the dastarkhan. Everyone seated around the dastarkhan takes a cup of tea. As soon as the cup is empty, it is placed on the tray. After all empty cups are put on the tray, the hostess takes it to the samovar and pours tea again. The meat is served in the deep dish – tegene (astau). The elder member of the family distributes the pieces and cuts the meat into small pieces. The meat is usually served with the bread, sometimes with rice⁴.

The Kazakhs from the above-mentioned regions weave lint-free carpets on a vertical lathe. Their traditional clothes include *camisole* (a vest), *borik* (a round warm hat with fur edges), *masi* (soft boots). The Kazakhs used to wear *ayyrkalpak*, young women wore *oramal* (a scarf) in the form of a headband with a paper liner inside and ornaments made of silver coins and beads. Sometimes, women who observed five-time prayers (*namaz*) wore a turban. Girls had plaited braids or pigtails: little girls had one, young women had three, women over forty years had two braids, and old women had one braid. The local Kazakhs had many interesting ritual songs-spells, crying songs, special rituals related to the birth of a child, weddings and funerals.

Oralmen are also skilled in crafts. It ensured their economic integration in the new society. Not surprising that even now many oralmen run a small private business making objects of decorative art. As a result, there are enough articles of national applied art in the Kazakh market.

Traditional Kazakh applied arts capture and reflect the spirit and uniqueness of ethnic culture. Kazakh applied arts include the developed tradition of carpet weaving, patterned weaving, leather embossing, woodcarving and artistic metalworking, jewelry art. Local craftsmen manufacture various types of felt carpets, household goods from ornamental felt, ornamental mats. Such objects are the main elements of interior design for living spaces.

⁴ A. Toleubayev, D. Eskekbayev, *Some ethnographic features of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg region. All-Union session following the results of field ethnographic and anthropological studies 1988-1989: Thesis report*. Alma-Ata, 1990, Part 3, p. 125-127.

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The presence of the products of decorative and applied art in the Kazakh market encourages the active implementation of ethnic elements in the daily life of contemporary ethnic Kazakhs. These include wooden dishes, musical instruments, woolen carpets and other weaved items.



Figure 1. Astau, shara, ozhau

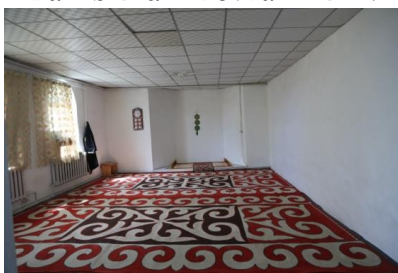
Astau is an oblong or round wooden dish used to serve the national dish *besbarmak*. The recipe consists of boiled mutton, beef, or horsemeat with special rolled bread *zhayma*. *Shara* is a cup for *kumys* (the national sour-milk drink from mare's milk), while *ozhau* is a ladle with a long wooden ornamental handle. *Ozhau* is an integral element of *shara*.



Figure 2. Dombrya

Dombrya is a Kazakh string musical instrument. Kazakh people believe that *dombrya* should be in every house of a true Kazakh. *Syrmak* is a felt Kazakh carpet manufactured of separate felt pieces of different colors in a mosaic technique when the patterns are cut into the background of the surface.

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a)



b)

Figure 3. a) Syrmak in a private house in Almaty; b) Syrmak in an apartment

The composition of the carpet superimposes many colors when quilted and stitched with a cord in patterns. *Syrmak* served as the main decoration of the yurt, the Kazakh national dwelling.

Even though *oralmen* return to their ethnic homeland from Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and other countries, they belong to the same ethnic group. They managed to preserve their national language and traditions, despite living outside Kazakhstan for 70 years or more. At the same time, due to their residence in various countries, *oralmen* brought foreign cultural traditions to Kazakhstan. The intertwining of varied folk imagery is based on different forms, ornaments, flower combinations, and graphics. Their applied and decorative art often employs local and foreign ethnic motifs of several countries. It affects the ethnic composition of contemporary living space.

The study of the ethnic composition of living space determined the temporary changes in interior design in the process of observing customs and traditions such as birth, weddings, etc. For the Kazakhs, the birth of a child has always been a significant joyful event. There is a proverb "*Balaly uy bazar, balasyz uy mazar*" meaning "A house with a child is filled with fun and happiness, while a house without a child is like a grave."

No wonder that the Kazakhs have many traditions and customs connected with the birth of a child. Traditionally, girls and boys are brought up together up to 5-6 years. Most rituals performed on children in infancy do not bear sexual characteristics. They include a dressing ritual *it koylek*, a holiday ritual *shildehana*, a naming ritual *kyndyk sheshe* (lit. "umbilical mother", i.e. godmother), *kyrkynan shygaru* (lit. "get out of forty days"), *at koyu* (calling) or *Azan Shakyru* (call), *tusan kesu*

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(cutting). Special significance is given to the ritual of *besikeke salu* (placing in a cradle). It was performed by *kindik sheshe* (second mother, "umbilical" mother). She covered the baby with seven things: a special blanket, a bathrobe, a *kibinek*, and a coat. If the baby was a boy, she also put a rein and a whip in the cradle, so he grew into a good rider. She also placed a knife to protect him from evil spirits. If the baby was a girl, she placed a mirror and a hairbrush for beauty in the cradle.



Figure 4. Besik – a cradle for a newborn

Traditionally *besik* is made of pine, birch or other bending species of wood so the cradle is durable and eco-friendly. The unique design of the Kazakh cradle has no analogues. The outer part of the cradle is its base. There is a special hole with *shumek* (a tube) for urine made from the bone in the base and *tubek* (a pot). Also, *besik* has such components as *shi* (hey), *jorgek* (mattress), *kus tosek* (feather), *jastyk* (pillow), *korpe* (blanket), *kepil* (props), *tarpa bau* (belts), *jabu* (bedspread).

Kazakh folklore often features *besik* in fairy tales, proverbs and sayings, in songs and poems. The Kazakhs attach special significance to *besik* considering it a sacred object. Its placement in the residential interior changes its composition and the color pallet of living space. Due to its unique design, *besik* is gaining increasing popularity among the urban population.

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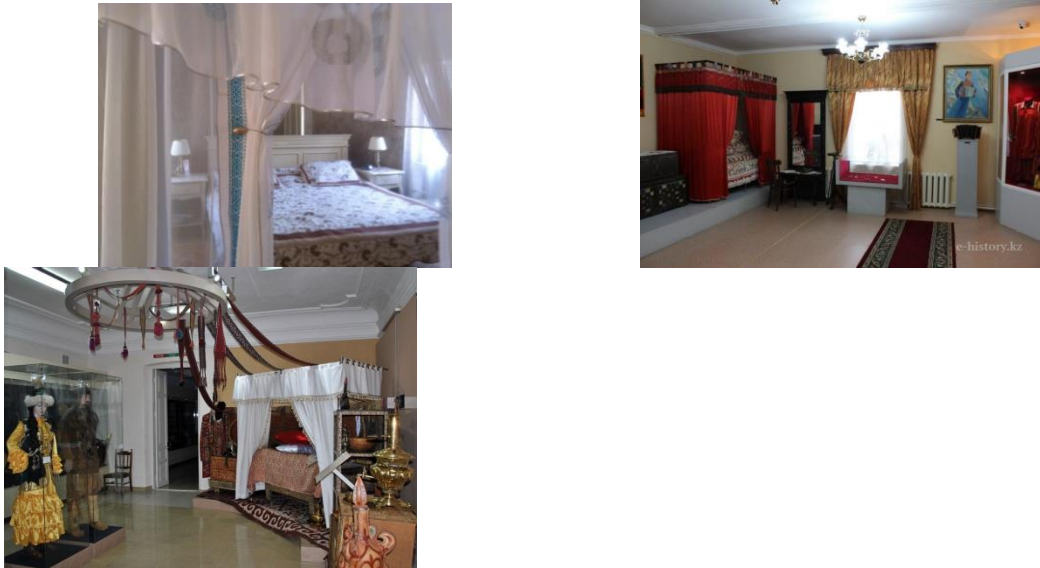


Figure 5. Compositional application of shimildyk in contemporary interior

Kelin tusiru is one of the stages of the Kazakh wedding when the bride enters the groom's house. Traditionally, the bride was not brought to the house but left at some distance from the village along with the *jenge* (wife of her husband's brother). Girls and young women went out to meet the bride. Without showing her face, the bride was brought into the house and put behind the *shymyldyk* (a screen) with other girls. Then they conducted a ceremony called *betashar*. The *betashar* is the ritual of uncovering the bride's face and showing the bride to the groom's relatives and guests. Traditional songs accompanied the ritual when the bride in the wedding dress was brought to the yurt of the groom's father, where guests gathered. The bride was introduced by polite daughter-in-laws. The *betashar* also includes the acquaintance of the bride with her husband's relatives, who gave her wise advice and kind wishes for the future in family life. The singer, describing respectable relatives in songs and poems, encouraged the bride to bow to everyone. Then the groom's close relatives gave a *korimdik* (a gift "for looking"). The *betashar* ends with instructions, wishes, and advice from the guests to the bride. After the wedding, the *shymyldyk* took the center place in the interior of the sleeping room before the birth of the first-born child.

The required attribute of the Kazakh bride is a *sandyk* (a trunk) with blankets and bedding items prepared by the bride's relatives.



Figure 6. Sandyk in contemporary interior

The bride's trunks are made of wood decorated with national ornaments, metal elements, mirrors, semiprecious stones and leather.

Preparation and planning should precede the execution of ethnic interior design because the process includes the research and study of historical artifacts associated with traditional culture, as well as the choice of stylizations and techniques. In the in-depth work *The Yurt in the Traditional Worldview of Nomads of the Central Asian-Kazakhstan Region* by A. Kunanbayeva and N. Zh. Shakhanova, the yurt is regarded as a model of the universe and the microcosm of the nomadic dwelling. The living space of the yurt is symbolic of the union of the male and female principles and their life-giving and creative essence. The installation of the yurt involves the male and female work. With the help of a pole, men lift and install the dome of the yurt – *shanyrak* that has a sacred meaning. *Shanyrak* is a place where the child afterbirth is stored (some women also store it under the threshold). *Shanyrak* has scarves with the money handed out to women. When the yurt is assembled, a pair of swings is attached to *shanyrak*. *Bakan* (a pole) was used in ceremonies of the maternity cycle as it marked the place for delivery. Together with a horse bridle, it forms a supporting structure for a woman in labor. A newborn was placed near a *bakan*. It is also used in wedding rituals and games to push and shove the matchmakers, to block the entrance to the yurt. It is strictly forbidden to step over or on a *bakan*⁵.

⁵A. Kunanbayeva, N.Zh. Shakhanov, *The yurt in the traditional worldview of nomads of the Central Asian-Kazakhstan region*, p. 125-127.

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The yurt of nomads from the Central Asian-Kazakhstan region (Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Karapalpaks, etc.) had an anthropomorphic conception. Traditionally, the yurt was treated as a living creature as seen in the names of its parts. For example, the yurt's frame is called *nydin suyegi* (backbone). The back of the yurt is called *arkasy* (back), the side lattice – *zhanbas* (pelvis, pelvic bones), and the yurt's center – *kindik* (umbilical cord). The dome rails are called *uyk uyktyñ iygy* (shoulder), the base is *uyka karyn* (belly), the dome's socket is called *kez* (head). The Kazakh yurt is divided into several semantic sectors: left and right, male and female, sacred (torus, opposite the entrance) – profane (near the entrance). The hearth and dome are the yurt's semantic center.

The elements of the yurt have different degrees of sacredness: hearth, torus, dome, supporting pole, door, and threshold. The threshold represents a cultural complex of beliefs and taboos of the universal nature.

National identity is represented in ethnic design through references to historical heritage. One of the approaches is to reinterpret the formal and aesthetic characteristics of traditional composition. In such a case, the historic models move to the front to emphasize the "external" form. This approach introduces national identity into the architectural environment.

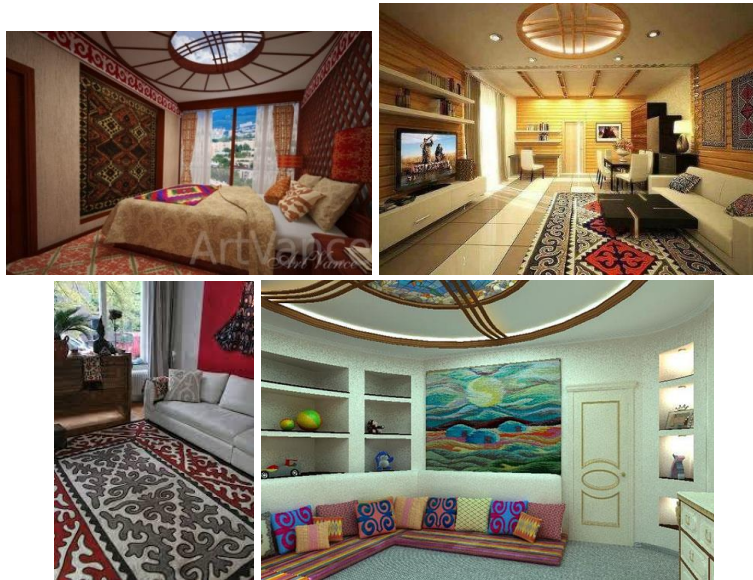


Figure 7. Elements of the yurt in contemporary interior

However, it should be noted that the direct application of the traditional form carried out in a morphological manner might alter the modern ideas about spatial organization as it goes beyond the traditional style. The development of the past can be carried out according to the "syntactic" method that reproduces traditional forms, not mechanically and reliably, but rather as an associative, transforming and stylizing element of heritage, in accordance with the dialectic nature of an architectural work.

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E. K. Kirichenko⁶ states that the purpose of design is not historical authentic reproduction but rather the creation of new objects and forms in the spirit of modernity. With focus on modernity, the stylized objects break away from traditional prescriptions. The form is changed to achieve better expression of the general artistic idea of the architectural image of a contemporary work.

The composition of living space develops in the promising direction of historical heritage application in indirect and metaphorical ways.

National architectural features should be associated with modernity, since the national is primarily associated with the social conditions determined in a specific historical period. In addition, the form is not simply the sum of graphic lines but it is the specific historic result of cultural development. The real significance of the tradition is not only in its historical and cultural value, but, above all, in its ability to integrate into national architecture.

Metaphorical trends in the development of the national form are the logical result of the national cultural focus on the present. Such a focus on the present helps to avoid the excesses of historicism and overcome obstacles to the creative process.

The analytical study of architecture and design of traditional living spaces invites an exploration of the layouts in regional and Asian types of dwellings. Ch. K. Omurbekov dedicated his comparative study to the stationary Kyrgyz dwellings in multiethnic areas⁷.

"*Oralmen*" are a unique socio-cultural product of both worlds: national and foreign. As ethnic Kazakhs, they saved their ancestral traditions in the foreign cultural environment with hopes of returning to the historic homeland. They also adopted elements of the host culture. Living in the foreign cultural environment crystallized the ethnic component of identity. The preservation of traditions requires dedication and commitment, constant work on behavior, education, informational filters, decision making. The younger generation of *oralmen* has both foreign and national signs (transnational repatriates), which leads to the formation of hybrid identities and cultural practices, if not integrated by adaptation and education⁷.

Thus, the typological elements of stationary Kyrgyz dwellings have two zones: southern and northern. The first zone, encompassing the multiethnic plain valleys of the Osh region, is characterized by diverse regional Fergana-type dwellings. The second zone, including the northern and north-western regions of the country, differs in architectural designs, plans and subtypes.

Dwelling types are defined and shaped by topography, climatic conditions, social status of the home owners, building traditions, skills, and residents of each region and the influence of neighboring peoples – Uzbeks, Tajiks, Russians,

⁶ E.K. Kirichenko, *The Russian Style*, Laurence King Publishing, 1991.

⁷ Ch.K. Omurbekov, *Comparative study of the stationary dwelling of the Kyrgyzs (1917-middle 1930s)*, p. 125-127.

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Uighurs, as well as other cultural and historical traditions of peoples living on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. In many cases, there is a dominant type of dwelling design.

The southern Kyrgyz dwelling is characterized by a two- or three-dimensional straight elongated layout, a flat roof, an *aiwan* (open gallery resting on pillars), a hall that can serve as a kitchen, a summer part, a bedroom elevation (*supa*), numerous niches, separate rooms, quince, inner ornamental wooden cornice (*basma*) and rooms for guests. The Fergana-type dwelling can be divided into several subtypes: 1) a simple two-chambered rectangular or L-shaped layout with an attached room for livestock, where *aiwan* occupies only one corner of the yurt and *supa* is absent; 2) a dwelling similar to the first type but its livestock premises are replaced with a living room, and a terrace stretches along the entire front wall (*aiwan*); 3) two rooms merged with *aiwan* (*chukur ayvandy*), with *supa* and a hearth-fire; 4) a two-chamber dwelling with a rectangular layout of Balaken type of house (from Tajik "*bolo-bona*" – a premise on the second floor). It is common in the piedmont and mountain areas of the Sokha and Pulgon region⁸.

The northern Kyrgyz residential dwelling was less affected by ethnic Asian elements and traditions. There are several subtypes: 1) a one- or two-chambered square dwelling (*zhalpak tam* or *kara tam*) representing a transition from the circular yurt to the stationary dwelling; 2) a two- or three-chambered dwelling with a hallway, a family room and a guest room; 3) a two-chambered log house (*jygach tam*) with a flat roof popular in the Issyk-Kul and Chui valley with more affluent Kyrgyz families under the influence of Russian and Ukrainian building traditions.

Scalability is one of the main components of the architectural composition with special interest to ethnic metrology. In his scientific work *Typical Features of Traditional Metrology* V. A. Dmitriev describes the methods of measuring the surrounding space and its objects that are used in everyday life⁹. He approaches the ethnic aspects of metrology as a fixed system of measures and weights of a single ethnic group. Undoubtedly, there is a linguistic aspect of ethnic metrology, as "for each measure there is a specific term of perspective philological-linguistic and ethnic studies, their methods and objective area difference." Metrology is a part of traditional everyday culture of the ethnic group and at the same time has the characteristics of universal cultural phenomenon. This is expressed in categories of weights and measures with inter-ethnic distribution due the typological features of traditional metrology. Traditional metrology originated from the human need to measure objects in the environment. The leading feature of the domestic metric practice is the substitution of the principle measuring the principles of rapid, attractive comparison with any familiar subject that appears to be commensurate.

⁸ Sh.K. Utenova, *Interpretation of the traditional form in modern architecture of Kazakhstan. Doctoral dissertation*, Moscow, All-Russian Research Institute of Theory of Architecture and Urban Development. 1987.

⁹ V. A. Dmitriev, *Typical features of traditional metrology. All-Union session following the results of field ethnographic and anthropological studies 1988-1989: Thesis report*, p. 125-127.

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This feature is in potency to the resolution range of standards to the size of the outside world, as well as to the gradual formation of the individual measures, and village societies.

Traditional metrology is based on the use of anthropometric indicators as the basic reference standard. A variety of options for arm movements gave rise to a large number of linear measures; the growth of the human body in different positions is the basis of standards used in the construction of housing or clothing manufacture. Indirectly anthropometric measures were reflected in the volume as well as in the size of utensils related to consumption, preparation and distribution of food. Traditional metrology expresses the prevailing attitude toward space, showing different accuracies of measurement techniques in the residential space, the space of individual activities, the space of collective and economic activity, and the space external to the activities of daily living.

Territories had to be measured to be used. Traditional metrology is embedded in everyday actions reflecting both cultural and economic features. It has an adaptive function: it blends traditional measures with metric systems. Their specific combination was caused by historical conditions of the group of contacting ethnic cultures. Traditional metrology represents macro-ethnic heritage.

The Kazakh language has a huge number of idioms indicating height, volume, value, and size. They usually employ concepts familiar to every Kazakh such as the size of animals (e.g. horses). For example, *argymaktay* "tall as an *argymak*", *tayday* "like a stallion," *atanday* "like a camel," *narday* "like a male camel", *shokeken narday* "as a cross-legged camel", *tuyedey* "like a camel", *kunazhyn siyrday* "like a bull", *kunan ogizdey* "like an ox." From a semantic point of view, *at basynday* (*altyn*) indicates the size of a house head (large), *at arkasynday* indicates the width of the house (wide), and *at tobesindey* indicates the house top. It proves once again the special role of the house in the economic life of the Kazakhs.

In comparative linguistics, special attention is paid to the units indicating "small" and "large". In the Kazakh language they are presented by the words *alpamsaday* (giant), *abazhaday* (huge), *kalpanday* (huge), *batpanday* (large), *zangarday* (large). The first two words are found mostly in the folklore texts and belong to the category of archaisms.

Modern Kazakh designers turn to ethno-cultural motifs in their work with social responsibility. Prior to planning, they usually conduct cultural, ethnographic, and linguistic studies of ethnic heritage. A professional approach is required to different historical periods. Nevertheless, there are some typical phenomena to confirm the importance of Hegel's dialectic law of cycle development. In the development of ethnic style, there is a cyclical "traction" to historical heritage.

Ethnographic exhibitions and ethnographic museums can contribute to the general education of people about their historic heritage. Folk art objects in museums should demonstrate the diverse factual material and promote inherited traditions. Ethnographic exhibitions should also demonstrate the artifacts of both traditional and consumer culture created by a particular ethnic group.