

Symbol of Carving of the Ger

Molomjamts Munkhdalai^{1, *}

¹ Mongolian National University of Education, 976, Mongolian

* Corresponding author: Molomjamts Munkhdalai (Email: m.molomjamts@gmail.com)

Abstract: The profession of "kheech" (carver) or "kheechin" was created and developed by the people themselves. Woodworkers, especially those working on the ger, use various handmade tools, including base supports, wedges, pegs, and tools for shaping wood, some of which may have interlocking parts. Carving tools include chisels, hand chisels, hammer chisels, repair chisels, and square chisels, in small, medium, and large sizes. The combined art of carving and decorating wood, born from the people's living environment, evolved into a unique form with distinct colors and regional characteristics. The decoration of the interior wooden parts of the ger began when it became common to use color and paint. This change occurred when people stopped using the sun's position to measure time and started marking the ends of the wooden beams with paint for distinction. The carved patterns on these beams became important markers, with painting used to differentiate and decorate the wooden elements.

Keywords: Symbol of Carving, Carving, Ger, art.

1. Introduction

As time passed and people stopped using the sun's position to measure time, the practice of painting the ends of beams became common, which led to the development of the art of carving and decorating. Originally, people measured time by the sun's path and worked according to that rhythm. The style of ger construction is classified as Mongol or Turkic, but the art of carving and decorating became unified, combining common elements with unique decorative patterns that evolved over time. The decorative patterns, which reflect the artistic essence of the people, are considered part of folk art because they were created by the people over generations. These patterns and the craftsmanship involved are deeply linked to the passage of time, evolving with new influences and ideas. Over time, the folk art of the ger grew richer, influenced by the desires, imagination, and philosophical thoughts of the people. The ger, frequently used during otor (pasturing livestock in groups to seek better grazing), was crafted to meet practical needs and withstand wear and tear. However, larger gers used during otor were not as often decorated or painted. The art of carving and decoration in these gers involved a deep understanding of color and form, with intricate designs that reflected both the practical and aesthetic needs of nomadic life.

2. Analysis of Mongolian Ger Carving Symbol

2.1. Figures of Mongolian Ger Carving Symbol

The craft of carving and decorating the wood of the Mongolian ger is passed down through mentorship by skilled artisans such as kheech (carvers) and siilberch (engravers), who train apprentices. This close collaboration between master and apprentice ensures the continuity of the craft. Training starts with the basic construction and disassembly of wooden components for the ger, progressing to the design and carving of decorative patterns. Young artisans learn to sketch compositions, mix pigments, and use brushes properly, while also understanding color harmony and design principles. This

training is not confined to the local community but extends to neighboring regions, as the artwork contributes to both the aesthetic and cultural life. In traditional ger construction, wood is painted with natural pigments, mainly red, ochre, and yellow, with red often used as the base color. Over time, color layering techniques developed, where the red base color is complemented by patterns in blue, red, and green. The red fades into lighter tones, creating a rhythmic visual effect. Initially, artisans used earth-based varnishes and plant-derived paints, but modern techniques have since been incorporated. The natural patterns of the wooden beams harmonize with the white felt roof, enhancing the visual aesthetics of the interior. (See Figure 1)

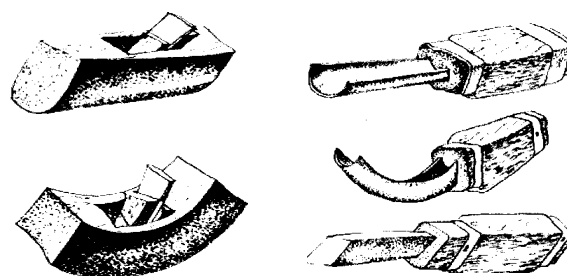


Figure 1. Tree guard

2.2. Meaning of Mongolian Ger Carving Symbol

Among the most significant features of the ger is the toono, the circular opening at the top, which symbolizes both physical and spiritual light. The toono's decoration evolved over time, incorporating motifs of light such as antlers, curving shapes, and expanding designs. Symbols of good fortune, like ulzii (prosperity), were also painted around the toono, symbolizing blessings and spiritual protection for the household. These motifs are not only decorative but carry spiritual significance, reflecting the connection between the physical and spiritual realms in Mongolian culture. On the outer white felt covering of the ger, the area around the toono is adorned with a radiant, sunburst-like pattern, expanding the

space visually and creating a sense of openness that resonates with the human psyche. Initially, the edges of the toono were painted with saltwater-based varnishes, but over time, a red-brown background became standard, with more intricate designs emerging. The toono and the uni (beam) form a harmonious pair, with the triangular roof and the toono working together to make the upper portion of the structure appear larger. The decorative patterns applied to the wooden beams above the toono enhance this sense of spaciousness. The toono has two circular sections, the larger one in the center and the smaller one around its base. The decorative patterns emphasize the upward movement of the eye, amplifying the sense of expansiveness. This circular shape helps to broaden the space, making the ger feel larger and more inviting. The interplay of decoration and design shapes the perception of space, creating a harmonious and balanced environment that influences the inner state of its inhabitants. In Mongolian culture, the colors used in the ger hold symbolic meaning. Dark colors represent the father, symbolizing strength and authority, while light colors represent the mother, embodying purity and nurturing qualities. The blending of these colors, known as the "son's color," symbolizes harmony and balance between the masculine and feminine principles. This balance of dark and light is reflected in the overall design of the ger, creating a profound connection between art, color, and symbolism. (See Figure 2)

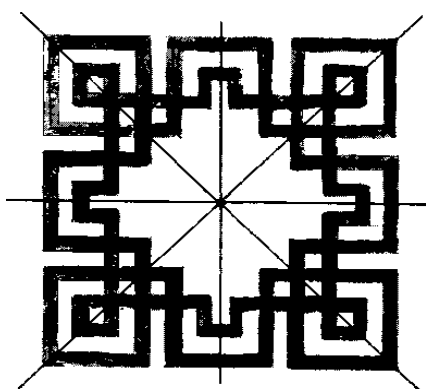


Figure 2. The pattern of the harves

Thus, the philosophy of family life, which has been passed down from our ancestors, is reflected in the worldview of colors used in the ger. The phrase "patterns and designs are dual in nature" can be understood by recognizing that, just like the colors associated with the father and mother, the combination of these elements creates a third, harmonious color or form, which plays a significant role in the overall design. When we observe the application of color in various objects in the world, it becomes apparent that it is not merely symbolic but also undergoes a process of merging and adaptation. The stability of these colors is intrinsically linked to the deeper philosophical context they represent. In the ger, the predominant colors—range, red-brown, and golden yellow—are intentionally used in the carving and decorative techniques, embodying the spiritual and symbolic essence of the Mongolian people's traditions and intellect. The introduction of wood in the construction of the ger led to the development of local carving traditions, which are closely tied to the customs, climate, and livelihoods of the people. For example, the traditions in Uyanga, Uvurkhangai province and Zuunkhangai, Uvs, and other localities exhibit unique decorative styles that align with their specific cultural

practices. The carving and ornamentation of the ger not only beautify the interior but also have a significant psychological impact on the inhabitants, uplifting their spirits and fostering a more positive and productive life. Mongolian scholars have long categorized the ger as part of the Mongol and Turkic heritage, and much research has been conducted on its historical and ethnographic aspects. However, it is equally important to examine the artistic principles, patterns, and logic behind the decorations to fully understand their significance. The art of woodcraft in Mongolian ger design is ancient, and its tradition has been preserved and passed down, especially in places like Uyanga, Khankhukhii, and Urguu, where these crafts are most prevalent today. The roots of this art form are deeply embedded in the natural world, symbolizing the sun, moon, birds, trees, and life's vitality and joy. These symbols are not just decorative; they represent the energy and abundance of life itself, embodying a sense of harmony and prosperity that has been central to Mongolian culture for centuries (Batchuluun.L, 2005, Chapter 1).

2.3. Method of Mongolian Ger Carving Symbol

The art of carving and decorating the ger wood has always been crafted with an eye for beauty, harmonizing with the nomadic lifestyle of the Mongols and their deep symbolic traditions. The process of carving and decorating has been passed down through generations, with local styles inherited through mentoring and apprentice relationships. Initially, the surface of the wood was coated with a mix of saltwater and maajin (a natural resin), creating a smooth finish. Over time, this evolved, and birch bark and other materials were abandoned in favor of a more standardized technique, which involved applying a red-brown base color. The wood was then adorned with geometric patterns such as antler motifs, royal symbols, and floral engravings. These intricate designs not only enhanced the aesthetic but also carried deep cultural significance. The art form, which originally used natural materials like birch and plant-based dyes, was influenced by the practical needs of nomadic life. The vibrant colors and patterns, including red, yellow, and green, reflect both natural elements and symbolic meanings, contributing to the spiritual and physical well-being of the people who lived within these homes (Batchuluun.L, 1984, p. 404).

2.4. Color of Mongolian Ger Carving Symbol

Woodcarvers have traditionally used five primary colors—white, red, yellow, blue, and green—as the basis for the patterns on ger wood. These colors symbolize various elements and are combined in the creation of decorative motifs. In the 11th century, Sumbe Khamba Ishbaljir, in his work *Tsetgen Erkhi*, emphasized the importance of the father, mother, and child colors in decoration, while avoiding neutral tones. Over time, Mongolian ger wood patterns gradually shifted in hue, with the famous "Uyanga" style emerging in the 20th century. This style introduced a unique principle of "harmony," balancing warm and cool tones through the use of complementary colors. If we compare this to the ancient Turkic-Mongol traditions, there is no direct "harmony" tradition in the early stages, but rather an emphasis on innovation and training. The technique of color layering, known as "harmony," involves applying earthy tones and gradually deepening the colors with successive layers. This progression from light to dark colors creates a subtle gradient, starting with white and blending into deeper blues and blacks.

The blending of colors to create a rich, harmonious effect was called *solongon ereen*, which is equivalent to a rainbow of hues. This method became integral to the Uyanga style of ger wood art, with famous artisans like Dorj, Galav.Ya, Tserendulam.D, and others perfecting these techniques. Mongols recognized the technique of layering earth and stone pigments to achieve the desired tonal progression, incorporating five primary colors—red, yellow, blue, black, and white—into their decorative motifs (Batchuluun.L, 1984, p. 401).

Until the 16th century, the rainbow color layering technique (*solongon dagnaas*) evolved within the folk arts, gradually transitioning into the decoration of homes, buildings, and religious structures such as temples and shrines. The Uyanga-style patterns used in these artworks are based on two main principles of color harmony: the *tuwikh dagnaas* (raw or unrefined color layering) and the *ikh dagnaas* (large-scale color layering). The *tuwikh dagnaas* involves a sharp transition from light to dark tones. The deeper, darker tones are achieved by layering and intensifying the colors, while the opposite technique, called *tsairuulga* (lightening), involves progressively lightening the colors in a sequence. The color layering sequence in Mongolian ger woodwork follows a structured system, akin to the frame structure of the ger itself. This sequence typically involves lightening or darkening in a gradual progression, with the use of 3 to 9 layers of color in the *ikh dagnaas* method, which enhances and multiplies the effect of the color harmonies. The technique involves blending three basic colors and gradually adding more layers of color, progressing through stages of 3, 5, 7, or 9 layers, with the final layer often being a white or light shade. In some cases, a specific sequence of colors is followed to create a harmonious effect, and the final design may incorporate various color combinations that achieve a balanced, harmonious appearance. A distinctive feature of the color layering technique in the Uyanga tradition is that blue and green tones are often blended with yellow, rather than red. The names of the colors used in this style reflect the cultural and symbolic significance of nature and the elements. For example, the red color used in the patterns may be referred to as *badmaarag* (a deep, rich red), the green as *nal erdniin* (precious emerald green), the blue as *nomin tsenkher* (turquoise blue), and the white as *lavai tsagaan* (a particular shade of white). Some variations of green, such as *bangiin nagoon* (sacred green) or *uzmen khuren* (violet-like grape), are also named after plants and nature. Through our research, we found that the intricate practice of color coordination and the layered color technique in ger woodwork were closely linked to formalized training methods. The training emphasized the importance of carefully selecting colors, and there were strict taboos regarding improper color use. For instance, it was considered inappropriate to overuse certain colors in specific ways. For example, an excessive amount of red in a design could result in a "sagging" effect, too much blue could make the design "stiff," and an overuse of green would make the design "unnatural" or "sharp." These principles were reflected both in material culture and in oral

traditions passed down through generations (Batchuluun.L, 1984, p. 402).

3. Conclusion

In the woodwork of the Uyanga-style ger, the technique of color layering follows two main principles: the harmonious balance of warm and cool tones. Over time, colors such as sacred green (*bangiin nagoon*), brown, yellow, dark blue, red, crimson, and blue-green have been traditionally used in layered sequences. For example, the sacred green is paired with reddish-pink tones, while dark blue is often combined with brownish-yellow hues. The structural wooden elements of the ger—such as the roof beams, door, and columns—are adorned with red-painted heads, with patterns further layered with green. These elements typically feature a reddish-golden green color tone, creating a harmonious and colorful design. The furniture inside the ger, along with the clothing of its inhabitants, are all coordinated in warm tones, contributing to a unified visual harmony. As a result, the furniture beams, and people's attire all blend seamlessly, creating a warm and cohesive atmosphere throughout the space. Thus, the ger's spatial design is uniquely organized with carefully coordinated patterns and colors. In Mongolian folk art, darker backgrounds are often paired with lighter accents, enhancing the sense of lightness and contrast within the space.

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