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**KAZAKH-RUSSIAN ROOTS OF ALLA ILCHUN (Yelshin)  
COMBATED AGAINST FASCISM,  
THE FUTURE MUSE OF CHRISTIAN DIOR  
(december 10, 1926 – march 6, 1989)**

The article is dedicated to Alla Ilchun, a woman with Kazakh and Russian roots, who left her mark on the history and culture of France. Alla Ilchun was a world famous model, the muse of Christian Dior. According to some reports, she took part in the French Resistance movement.

Based on the documents and materials found in the archives of Russia and Kazakhstan, the authors examine the Kazakh roots of Alla Ilchun, the history of her family, the origin and fate of her father, a Kazakh and a Russian mother, the contribution that this outstanding woman made to the history of European fashion.

In the archives of St. Petersburg and Almaty, new documents have been identified that allow to restore and explore the biography of the father of Alla Ilchun. In the archive in Moscow, the authors discovered previously unknown information about the date of the death and funeral of Alla Ilchun.

An additional collection of documents and materials on the Kazakh-Russian roots of the outstanding model and style icon of Alla Ilchun should be carried out in Paris, Russia and China.

**Key words:** Alla Ilchun (Alla Ilitchoun), France, Kazakh roots, Christian Dior, World War II, the Resistance Movement.

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**Фашизммен күрескен Кристиан Диор музасы  
Алла Ильчуннің (Ельшин) қазақ-орыстық шығу тегі  
(10 желтоқсан 1926 – 6 наурыз 1989 ж.)**

Мақала Алла Ильчунге (Ельшин) арналған, оның шығу тегі қазақ пен орыс ұлтына жатады және ол Францияның тарихы мен мәдениетінде өз ізін қалдырған. Алла Ильчун бүкіл әлемге белгілі модель Кристиан Диордың музасы болған. Кейбір деректер бойынша, ол фашизмге қарсы француз Қарсыласу қозғалысына қатысқан.

Ресей мен Қазақстан архивтерінен табылған құжаттар мен материалдарға сүйене отырып, авторлар Алла Ильчуннің қазақтан шыққан тегін, оның отбасы тарихын, қазақ әкесі мен орыс шешесінің тағдырын, сонымен қатар, осы бір ғажап әйел тұлғаның европалық модаға қосқан үлесін зерттейді.

Санкт-Петербург пен Алматы архивтерінен Алла Ильчуннің әкесінің биографиясын зерттеуге және қалпына келтіруге мүмкіндік беретін жаңа құжаттар анықталды. Авторлар Мәскеу архивінен Алла Ильчуннің қайтыс болған және жерленген күні туралы бұрын белгісіз болып келген мәліметтерді тапты.

Керемет модель және стиль иконасы Алла Ильчуннің қазақ-орыстық шығу тегі туралы құжаттар мен материалдарды қосымша жинақтау жұмысы Парижде, Ресейде және Қытайда жүргізілуі тиіс.

**Түйін сөздер:** Алла Ильчун, Франция, Қазақ тегі, Кристиан Диор, Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс, Қарсыласу қозғалысы.

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**Казахско-русские корни сражавшейся с фашизмом  
Аллы Ильчун (Ельшин), будущей музы Кристиана Диора  
(10 декабря 1926 – 6 марта 1989 г.)**

Статья посвящена Алле Ильчун, женщине с казахскими и русскими корнями, оставившей свой след в истории и культуре Франции. Алла Ильчун была всемирно известной моделью, музой Кристиана Диора. По некоторым данным, она принимала участие во французском движении Сопротивления.

Опираясь на обнаруженные в архивах России и Казахстана документы и материалы, авторы исследуют казахские корни Аллы Ильчун, историю ее семьи, происхождение и судьбу ее отца – казаха и русской матери, тот вклад, который внесла в историю европейской моды эта незаурядная женщина.

В архивах Санкт-Петербурга и Алматы выявлены новые документы, позволяющие восстановить и исследовать биографию отца Аллы Ильчун. В архиве в Москве авторами обнаружены ранее неизвестные сведения о дате смерти и похорон Аллы Ильчун.

Дополнительный сбор документов и материалов о казахско-русских корнях выдающейся модели и иконы стиля Аллы Ильчун следует проводить в Париже, России и в Китае.

**Ключевые слова:** Алла Ильчун, Франция, казахские корни, Кристиан Диор, Вторая Мировая война, движение Сопротивления.

## Introduction

The turbulent events of the first half of the twentieth century scattered thousands of people around the world, many of whom were thousands of kilometers from their native land. They lived, fought, accomplished feats, married and gave birth to children, worked. Some of them left their mark on the history and culture of their new homeland, and very few were destined for world fame.

Among these people, we can safely refer the Kazakh woman Alla Ilchun (Alla Ilitchoun), who for twenty years has been the star of the Christian Dior fashion house in Paris.

Who was this woman with Kazakh roots, whom the audience in many countries of the world applauded for twenty years, who was the face of Christian Dior, the muse and favorite of great fashion designers?

## Kazakh origin and the family of Alla Ilchun

The famous world and first Eurasian model Alla Ilchun (Alla Ilitchoun) was a «style icon» and one of the most famous fashion models. Only recently it became known that Alla Ilchun (Yelshin in Kazakh) had a Kazakh father. In 2017, the French edition of *L'Officiel* wrote about the Kazakh origin of Alla Ilchun: «La première, Alla Ilchun, pommettes hautes et sourire rare, yeux de chat surlignés d'une touche d'eye-liner en forme de flèche, devait ses traits aty-

piques, mi-slaves mi-asiatiques, à une mère russe et un père kazakh.» (Emmanuelle Bosc, 2017)

Alla's father was called Zhuanhal (Zhumakhan, according to our version), the family of his future wife called him Eugene. According to the family archive of Alla Ilchun, currently owned by her only son, Mark de Dulmen, Alla's father was born in Verny (present-day Almaty) in 1897 and was the son of a wealthy bai. In the cities of Semirechenskaya Oblast, which was part of the Turkestan Governor General, for example, in 1908, 4476 Kazakhs lived, in counties their number was 798379 people. (Mendikulova, Atantayeva, 2008)

Working with documents in the archives of Almaty and St. Petersburg allowed the authors to discover the following information. As you know, the surname Ilchun is not typical for the Kazakhs. In all likelihood, this is a Chinese transcription (derivative) of the Kazakh surname Elshyn, Elchinov, Elshibaev, Ilchinov, Ilshinov, etc.

In 2019, File 248 «Nominal lists of residents of Vernensky district. 1906» was discovered in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Fund 41 «Vernensky district administration. 1868-1918», Series 1. According to it, we were able to establish that at the beginning of the 20th century several families lived in Vernensky district, whose relative could be Zhumakhan (Zhuankhal) Ilchun. In the Maloalmatinsky volost, the family of Kulan Ilchebaev lived (CSA RK. F. 41. S. 1. F. 248. Sh. 99). Menlibay Elchibaev and his family lived in the

East Talgar Volost. (CSA RK. F. 41. S. 1. F. 248. Sh. 73). Dzhamanbai Yelchekin lived in the Kargaly volost. (CSA RK. F. 41. S. 1. F. 248. Sh. 124). In the East Kasteksky volost of the Vernensky district – Elchenov Kazhumbay. (CSA RK. F. 41. S. 1. F. 248. Sh. 135). Each of these four families equally can or not be related to the father of Alla Ilchun. Further research should be carried out in the future, although it is very difficult at the moment due to the lack of documentary sources in Kazakhstan.

It is known that Zhumakhan (Zhuanhal) received higher education; we cannot vouch exactly where it was. We did not find evidence that he was supposedly studying the railway business and was involved in the construction of Turksib (Isayev, 2017), and our joint search led us to Harbin. The fact of his sending by the Soviet authorities to Harbin on a business trip is also not confirmed.

However, analyzing the available documents, we can assume that after the October Revolution, during the Civil War (1918-1920), Zhumakhan (Zhuanhal) arrived in Harbin, but not as a specialist from the Soviet side, but most likely as an emigrant after The October Revolution, when the Bolsheviks came to power and the expropriation of the expropriators began.

Why Harbin? Here we should first state the available information about the family of his future wife, mother of Alla – Tamara Vyacheslavovna Mikhailova. Tamara was born in the family of Vyacheslav Mikhailov and Elena Romanovskaya in St. Petersburg in 1910. According to the recollections of her grandson Mark de Dulmen, his maternal grandfather was a military man and was in the guard of Nikolay II, the last Russian Tsar. The Romanovskys also belonged to the Russian aristocracy. After the October Revolution, the family of Alla's mother was forced to move to the East. We remember very well the Bolsheviks first sent the royal family to Tobolsk and then moved to Yekaterinburg, where they were shot in the Ipatiev House on the night of July 17-18, 1918. The people devoted to the throne wanted to save the tsar's family, as one of their executioners Yakov Yurovsky recalled: «.. as far as I remember, I told Nikolay something like the following, that his royal relatives both in the country and abroad tried release him, but The Council of Workers' Deputies decided to shoot them.» (Solovyov, 2013)

It is possible that serving in the guard of the imperial family, Vyacheslav Mikhailov could participate in attempts to free the imperial family. In any case he and his family followed the imperial family beyond the Urals, and from there the most

common way for the White Guards to escape from the Bolsheviks was Harbin, in which the Russian colony existed since the end of the XIX century, due to the construction of the Sino-Eastern Railway (CER). Thus, the family of Vyacheslav Mikhailov, and possibly Zhumakhan Ilchun (Yelshin) reached Harbin, where they lived (according to documents available so far) until 1935.

Thanks to the searches of Doctor of History, professor of the St. Petersburg State University of Economics M.V. Krotova, a prominent expert on the history of the CER (Krotova, 2014), the first documents were found in which the name Ilchun is found. Many thanks to you Maria Vladimirovna for the documents provided!

The facts speak for themselves! So, the name Ilychun (I Lichun) was found in the documents of the meetings of the Board of the CER. In 1924 (from October 3), he took the post of acting Head of the Economic Bureau (EB) of the CER Railway at the Commercial Unit, as a representative of the Chinese side (G.N.Diky held this position on the Russian side). However, the protocol shows that he knew Russian.

Unfortunately, his personal file was not found in the archive, apparently, since in 1924 he was already a Chinese citizen, all affairs from the Chinese side must be sought in the archives of China.

Another point to pay attention to is Chinese citizenship. Because of the revolution and civil war, according to Doctor of Historical Sciences, M.V. Krotova about 100-250 thousand Russians were in Manchuria. (Krotova, 2014, p. 19) They were soldiers and officers who participated in the White movement, members and employees of the governments of Siberia and the Far East, the intelligentsia and the most ordinary people. The Russian population of Harbin was the largest outside of Russia.

On September 8, 1920, the Republic of China declared that it no longer recognized the Russian consulate in China, and on September 23 it cut off all ties with representatives of the Russian Empire and refused to recognize the extraterritorial rights of its citizens. Thus, overnight, Russians in China were stateless. After that, the Chinese government established control over state institutions in Harbin, such as the courts, police, prison, post office, as well as research and educational institutions.

In 1924, China and the USSR signed an agreement in Beijing, establishing the legal status of the CER. In particular, it allowed only Soviet and Chinese citizens to work on the CER. Thus, the majority of Harbin residents, in order not to lose

their jobs, had to accept Soviet citizenship, which was associated with a certain political identity. Many Harbin Russians did just that for patriotic reasons. Others remained stateless and lost their jobs on the CER. Gradually, the question of citizenship and political identity split the Russian population of Harbin into two camps.

Alla's father, Zhumakhan Ilchin, did not accept Soviet citizenship, but chose Chinese, apparently because he was confident in his professionalism. Therefore, it happened. He began to work on the CER as a Chinese citizen.

In 1924, Jumahan was 27 years old and without a good education, the Chinese side would hardly have sent him to such a significant post in the CER. Consequently, he received a (possibly higher economic) education until 1924, and it is possible that in St. Petersburg.

Further, Doctor of Historical Science, Professor M.V. Krotova followed the lists, and it turned out that he was listed in this position on various lists. One of them dated January 1, 1929. (Russian State Historical Archive. F. 323. S. 9. F. 6278). His salary is also indicated here – 6300 rubles per year (it was a lot of money). Therefore, the data held in some sources that the alleged family of Alla Ilchun in Harbin lived poorly, is not true. He served as head of The Economic Bureau (EB) of the CER during the Sino-Soviet conflict. According to another list of senior agents of the CER on April 1, 1932, he (recorded as E-Li-Chun) is listed as acting EB Manager, Chinese subject (Russian State Historical Archive. F. 323. S. 11. F. 441).

As for his wife Tamara Vyacheslavovna Ilchun (nee Mikhailova), in 1932 she graduated from a private medical school with honors in Harbin and received a dentist's diploma (Irishev, 2019, p. 91), and was not an opera singer, as some articles mistakenly report. Tamara Vyacheslavovna tried herself as an opera singer only in Paris, where, according to the recollections of her grandson, she participated in some productions for Russian emigration. Returning to Harbin, we note that Zhumakhan also got her a job on the CER, since the list of employees of the CER has a doctor Ilychun (with Chinese citizenship) (Russian State Historical Archive. F. 323. S. 11. F. 441).

An interesting fact about the life of Zhumakhan (Zhuankhal) in Harbin is evidenced by a photograph where a tall, strong-bodied man, dressed in Kazakh in Borik, a camisole and high boots, stands with his back to the camera and is engaged in training a beautiful horse. In practice, this is the only photograph depicting Zhumakhan Ilchun (Yelshin),

preserved to this day in the family album of his grandson Mark de Dulmen.

It was 1935, a critical year for Harbin. Further, in the lists of 1935, there was not the name of Zhumakhan Ilchun. Is this not coincidence with the fact that Japan attacked China, and Alla's father was forced to move his family to Shanghai – the only port that still continued to carry out sea transportation from China to Europe?

According to the memoirs of Alla Ilchun herself, Zhumakhan Ilchun organized the move of Alla and her mother Tamara Vyacheslavovna to Paris on a Scandinavian ship in 1936, and he remained in China. The question arises: «Why didn't he go to Paris with them?» Our assumptions are that, holding such a high post on the CER, and the railway was always a strategic object, he could not travel abroad, the Chinese authorities did not let him out.

There were versions that he could die during the organization of the export of refugees, or ended up in KarLAG or Japanese camps. However, while the version of KarLAG is not confirmed, due to the fact that he was a Chinese citizen, and members of the Eastern Chinese Railways got into the Soviet GULAGs and KarLAGs, who had Soviet citizenship, who were exported from Manchuria and then sent to the Soviet Union in exile.

Further, all the data on the fate of Zhumakhan Ilchin (Yelshin) must be sought in the Chinese archives.

### **The life and activity in France**

20 days after sailing from Shanghai, Tamara Vyacheslavovna and Alla reached the shores of France, where they began a new life.

We are very interested in the period of Alla Ilchun's life, when she fought in units of the Resistance Movement, as reported by several Internet resources (Isayev, 2017).

The information is more than interesting, since this fact of participation is associated with the names of Princess Tamara Volkonskaya and Ariadna Scriabin. Both Russian immigrants who fought against fascism in the south of France. But the question arises: how did Alla get to the south of France from Paris? And why is it precisely with these legendary personalities that her name is associated?

Tamara Alekseevna Volkonskaya (pseudonym Thérèse Dubois, Teresa Dubois, La Pranses or the Red Princess) (1900, St. Petersburg – June 3, 1967, was buried in the cemetery in Plazac) (Rozanova, 2016).

As for Ariadna Aleksandrovna Skryabina (aka Sarah Knut and other pseudonyms), she died during the war on June 22, 1944 in Toulouse

It is reported that white emigrant peers attracted Alla Ilchun to the partisan struggle. Alla, shoulder to shoulder, participated in street battles in southwestern France. So far, we do not have documents on this issue, however, there is a version: an oral confirmation of this fact from an employee of House Dior, who refers to the book «Red Orchestra» dedicated to the famous Soviet counterintelligence group «Red Chapel». It seems that this fact is unlikely, but as they say: «There is no smoke – without fire.» This version is also subject to verification and the searching for evidence or lack thereof in the archives of Russia, France and Germany.

After the end of World War II, the girl got a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant. It was at this time that Christian Dior, who was just starting his brilliant career, engaged a young beauty in his work. This happened after the war, in 1947, when Mr. Great Case himself brought her to the Christian Dior Fashion House. Meeting with the great fashion designer completely changed the life of Alla Ilchun.

In one of her few interviews, after retiring, Alla told fashion historian A. Vasiliev that she once accompanied to Dior her friend, who made her way into fashion models. The friend was immediately rejected, and Christian Dior paid attention to Alla. Alla said: «While waiting for my girlfriend in the lobby, I noticed that the curtains of the changing rooms were constantly moving apart, and curious glances overlooked me from head to toe. In the end, I was tired of both the looks and the wait itself, and I decided to look for the missing friend. Then a certain woman said that Christian Dior really wants to see me. Reluctantly, I agreed. They brought me into the cabin, pulled off my dress in an instant, combed my hair on one side like a big plush, tinted my lips with red lipstick, put on a new dress and terribly uncomfortable «stilettos» and led downstairs, where the team of painters in white coats was working hard. Well, I thought, dressed like a monkey, and then led to the painters. As they brought, they took us away, but I did not notice Dior there. Then the same woman said «Mademoiselle, you are engaged.» (Vasilyev, 2008, p. 345-346). Christian Dior himself was among the painters.

Thus began the career of Alla Ilchun. Alla's highlight was her Asian form of eyes – the daughter took Kazakh appearance from her father, Asian facial features. This, combined with her natural talent, made her a world celebrity. Before the advent of Alla, Dior's Eurasian girls did not work in the field

of fashion. Alla, of course, was a pioneer. Her slanted eyes not only delighted, but also forced millions of women to lengthen the section of their eyes, painting on ink with arrows that became fashionable in the 1950s. Alla Ilchun told A. Vasiliev about her work with Dior: «Dior adored me and forgave me all sorts of mischief and pranks. For me, he was the second father and gave me evening dresses for going out. «I was very harmful – I poured, for example, powder for sneezing under the nose to clients and pinched the other fashion models with my toes» (Vasilyev, 2008, p. 346).

Dior called Alla Ilchun his muse and believed that she brought him good luck. The same opinion was shared by another great fashion designer, Yves Saint Laurent, who continued to work with the fashion model for 10 years after the death of Christian Dior.

Alla traveled the world a lot with fashion shows. She closely knew Dior and his assistant Yves Saint Laurent and remained in this illustrious house, in her own words, «under three modes»: she worked in the fashion house under Christian Dior, and under Yves Saint Laurent, and during the leadership home by Mark Boan. In addition to Dior, she was invited to other fashion houses, such as Givenchy, Irina Galitsyna and others. She was a high-class professional. All her life she kept a very slim figure and worked very actively.

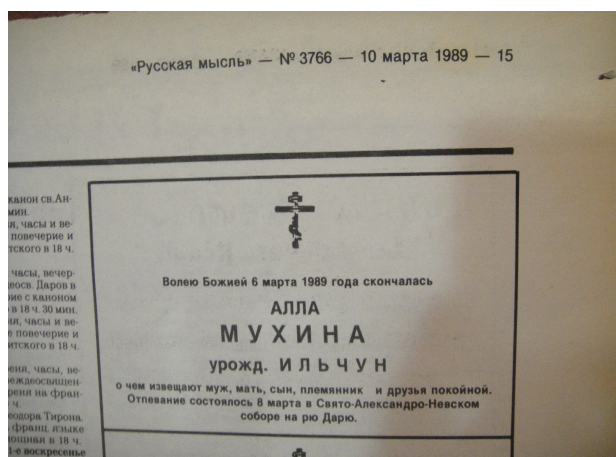
Until recently, almost nothing was known about the personal life of Alla Ilchun. She kept secret everything related to this.

It is known that Alla Ilchun married on November 13, 1953, to the Polish count, photographer Mike de Dulmen, who also worked for Christian Dior. The couple had an only son, Mark de Dulmen. Earlier in the media, it was reported that Alla had two children: a boy and a girl, but, in fact, it was the daughter of Mark's father, Mike de Dulmen, in his second marriage.

After Alla left the podium, she worked at the French-Chinese rice import company (Irishev, p. 108); she was fluent in several foreign languages.

For a long time, the date of death and the burial place of Alla Ilchun was unknown. As it turned out during the research, this did not happen by chance. In 2018, the authors of this article found an obituary in the archive of the House of Russian Abroad named after A. Solzhenitsyn, published in the newspaper *Russkaya mysl'* (Russian Thought) No. 3766, dated March 10, 1989. The obituary says «By the will of God on March 6, 1989, Alla Mukhina, nee Ilchun, died, about which the husband, mother, son, nephew and friends of the deceased are notified. The funeral service took place

on March 8 in the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral on Rue-Daru.» (Русская мысль, 1989).



Obituary announcing the death of Alla Mukhina (Ilchun).  
Russian thought. No. 3766. March 10, 1989.

We sent this document to Paris to Berlin Kenzhetayevich Irishev, who heads the Association of Kazakhstanis in France (AKF), which later allowed them to find Alla's grave.

The obituary discovered allows us to conclude that the mother survived Alla, and that Alla Ilchun married a second time, to Igor' Mukhin.

### Conclusion

The life and fate of Alla Ilchun, this extraordinary woman whose father was our compatriot, her contribution to the history of world fashion requires further investigation.

Complementary collection of documents and materials about the Kazakh-Russian roots of the outstanding model and style icon Alla Ilchun (Alla Ilitchoun) should be carried out in Paris, Russia and, of course, in China.

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