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(Article begins on next page)

**Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference:
Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945-1985**

A dissertation presented

by

Kathryn Amelia Dooley

to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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in the subject of

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**Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference:
Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945-1985**

Abstract

In the decades after World War II, consumption became the ground for a series of debates about Central Asian ethnic and cultural distinctiveness and its fate under modern, Soviet conditions. For nearly the entire span of Soviet history, state institutions in Central Asia manufactured not only “modern,” European-style consumer goods of the sort that were produced throughout the USSR, but also a set of locally specific “national goods.” Discussions within Soviet economic institutions, among Soviet artistic experts, and in the local-language press increasingly portrayed these national-style objects and the culturally distinctive practices they enabled as legitimate and even desirable components of a modern, socialist life for Central Asian consumers. Simultaneously, the state’s anxieties about the growth of consumer acquisitiveness and “bourgeois” mentalities allowed Central Asian traditionalism and ethno-cultural specificity to be reframed in the public discourse of the region as a potentially healthy influence, shoring up Soviet values against Western-looking consumerism and dissolute youth culture. By the Brezhnev-era 1970s, the permissible “national forms” defined in Soviet nationalities policy had expanded to include locally particularistic practices, ways of dressing and decorating the home, and gender and family relationships, all of which were imagined as broadly compatible with Soviet citizenship.

Yet far from resolving the question of the relationship between Central Asian ethnicity and modernity, the state’s legitimation of certain types of Central Asian ethno-cultural difference only

opened up further ground for debate among Central Asians themselves, relocating these discussions from the realm of state policy to the domains of family, community, and everyday social life in the region. Individual decisions to use one kind of good or another – a European-style table or a low Uzbek *xontaxta*, a modern knee-length skirt or a more modest “national dress” – became freighted with symbolic meanings in terms of both official Soviet and local Central Asian discourses of backwardness, modernity, authenticity, and ethnic identity. The result was that consumption fueled a flourishing of processes of contestation and boundary-drawing within local society in the late Soviet period, generating new lines of intra-ethnic differentiation – generational, cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic – among the Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumption and Ethnicity in Soviet Central Asia

In Soviet Central Asia, the ways that people used consumer goods – on their bodies, in their homes, on city streets and rural collective farms, in the intimacy of domestic life or the publicity of the bazaar or theater – mediated questions about ethnicity, modernity, self, and community that were thrown up amidst the increasingly cosmopolitan and interconnected cultural world of the Soviet Union in the decades after World War II. Between the 1950s and 1980s, Central Asia developed something like a consumer culture, differentiated from those developing in the U.S. and Western Europe during the same period by the peculiarities both of the Soviet economy and of the Central Asian setting, but resembling them in the way that goods became a new currency of social prestige, self-definition, and cultural (or counter-cultural) expression. Conventional images of the deprived Soviet consumer, victim to the shabby quality and grey uniformity of Soviet products and doomed to perpetual queueing to obtain even these, are not without their truth; but they neglect that this was also a world of technological novelties, magazine fashion spreads, coveted import products, and near-daily consumer decisions about quality and style, about what to buy, use, and wear and how it would be read by others. Soviet Central Asia, like Soviet Russia, had its own cohort of local youth in bell-bottoms and mini-skirts furtively exchanging bootlegged recordings of Western rock and pop music, and it had its own local guardians of respectability ready to criticize these youths' dissoluteness and immorality.

Paging through issues of an Uzbek- or Kyrgyz-language Soviet women's journal dating from the 1960s or 1970s, though, one might encounter something else unexpected, and more uniquely Central Asian, to challenge the impression of Soviet consumption as bleakly standardized and grey. Alongside photographs of neatly arranged, minimalistic Khrushchev-era apartments and fashion pages depicting muted skirt and jacket combinations for professional women, one finds a deluge of images of iridescent

silk and brightly patterned cotton, ornate embroideries and appliques, colorfully painted wooden chests and lush piles of quilts, tapestries, and carpets (Figure 0.1, Figure 0.2, Figure 0.3). Men in these journals were shown in distinctively Central Asian headwear, ornamented Uzbek skull caps and peaked Kyrgyz *kalpaks*. Women, as often as not, wore colorful headscarves over the flowing silhouettes and vivid wave-like patterns of the *atlas* silk dress. Families were pictured seated on the floor or on embroidered cushions, drinking tea from bowl-like ceramic *piyolas* (Figure 0.4).

The point is not merely that these images put on display the color, variety, and rich embellishment that are typically imagined as lacking in the Soviet consumer sphere. The startling thing is that Central Asian ethnic and cultural difference – a visible divergence from the norms of Russian or all-Soviet public life – is written everywhere into the pages of these journals. Consumer goods that were traditional or “national” in style, many of them produced as a matter of policy within Soviet institutions, became the raw materials out of which individuals could craft visibly non-Russian ways of living. By the late Soviet period, these objects became anchors for the exploration of alternative value systems and community affiliations. This visible “Central Asianness” was, moreover, neither concealed behind Soviet rhetoric of modernization and progress nor derided with Soviet rhetoric of backwardness. Local traditions and visible markers of cultural distinctiveness were, on the contrary, foregrounded and even celebrated in the Soviet Central Asian press of the post-war decades. “Look at the *atlas* dresses our young women wear in summertime,” one Uzbek-language article from 1971 proclaimed. “It is as if the incomparable beauty of Uzbekistan’s natural world finds its reflection in their colors.”¹ In Kyrgyzstan, where the Soviet state had violently stamped out the practice of nomadism in the 1930s, journals in the 1960s and 1970s proposed that the interior of the nomadic yurt might nevertheless serve as a model for the decoration of contemporary Kyrgyz homes: “All the adornments of the yurt (Kyrg. *boz üy*)... are the work of women, women’s art, women’s labor. They are the reflection of countless women’s intellects

¹ B. Mizroxin, “Kamalak Jilvalari,” *Saodat*, Mar. 1972, color insert.



Figure 0.1. Carpet-making workshop in Uzbekistan's Karakalpak ASSR. The workers are wearing Uzbek "national dresses" made from local *atlas* silk. Source: Photo by B. Mizroxin, *Saodat* no. 7 (Jul. 1978).



Figure 0.2. Artisan Sadybakas Kadyraliev at work painting a traditional Kyrgyz *sandyk* chest. Kadyraliev is wearing a black and white *kalpak*, Kyrgyz traditional men's headwear. Source: Photo by E. Mamadaliev, *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 10 (Oct. 1978).



Figure 0.3. Embroidering Uzbek *so'zanas* in Urgut, Uzbekistan. Source: Photo by B. Mizroxin, "Urgutda hamisha bahor," *Saodat* no. 10 (Oct. 1971).



Figure 0.4. Work brigade on a Kyrgyz collective farm sharing a meal of tea and bread. Source: Karymshak Tashbaev, "Talaa cholponu," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 6 (Aug. 1966): 2.

and talents... It is necessary to view the yurt not simply as a living space, but as belonging to the most wonderful cultural heritage of our people."² In this post-war Soviet discourse, uniquely Central Asian objects were not framed as incidental, as purely symbolic markers that differentiated Uzbeks and Kyrgyz from Russians or from one another, but as connected with distinctive practices, cultural priorities, and

² Asanbek Tabaldiev, "Üy turmushunun arkhitektoru," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1967), 13-14.

social relationships that provided Uzbekness or Kyrgyznes with an affirmative content. Even as televisions, refrigerators, bell-bottoms, and bootlegged cassettes were beginning to circulate through an increasingly globally connected Central Asian region, discussions within the Soviet Central Asian public sphere were positing the existence of an ethnically and culturally distinctive variety of Central Asian consumer, who might partake in a correspondingly ethnically and culturally distinctive brand of Soviet modernity.

Perhaps most surprisingly, this outcome, in which the policies and discourses of the Soviet state enabled the elaboration of a strong and affirmative ethno-cultural identity that diverged from the standards of “universal” European modernity and homogeneous Soviet internationalism, was not entirely an unintended consequence of state actions. The production of Central Asian-style consumer goods as part of the Soviet planned economy was a deliberate policy that was consistently reiterated from the 1920s through the 1980s. Moreover, the rhetoric that positioned these goods as part of a broader Soviet accommodation of Central Asian cultural values and alternative ways of life, though always challenged by competing interpretations of the relationship between the “national” and the “international” in Soviet policy, was not limited to a small number of local voices, but rather cut across many registers of Soviet public discourse, from Moscow-based officialdom to state-affiliated artists and ethnographers to the Central Asian cultural intelligentsia.

If agents of the Soviet state to some extent knowingly carved out a space for Central Asians to live in culturally particularistic ways without ceding their position as modern Soviet citizens, though, they did not control how Central Asians inhabited and made use of this space. In fact, far from comfortably resolving the question of the relationship between Central Asian ethnicity and modernity, the state’s legitimation of certain types of Central Asian ethno-cultural difference only opened up further ground for anxious debate among Central Asians themselves, in essence relocating these discussions from the realm of state policy to the domains of family, community, and everyday sociability

in the public and private spaces of the region. On this more purely local stage, decisions about the consumption of particular kinds of goods – “European-style” or “Central Asian-style,” imported or locally produced, adhering to standards of urban “culturedness” or of rural modesty and respectability – became both a testing ground for individual self-presentations and a sphere for the disputation of social and cultural norms in which ideas of morality and community belonging were dynamically reworked and enacted.

In this sense, the theme of consumption allows us to take a cross-section view of late Soviet Central Asian society, cutting across the divisions between political history, cultural history, and the history of the everyday. From a methodological standpoint, each chapter of this dissertation will address a distinct set of institutions and actors – economic ministries and production enterprises of the USSR and the Central Asian republics, Soviet artistic experts and cultural organizations, the local-language Soviet press, satirical writers and cartoonists, ethnically Central Asian consumers – and draw on a different combination of sources, ranging from Soviet archives to Uzbek and Kyrgyz women’s journals to oral histories. Rather than providing a comprehensive history of any one of these institutions or groups, the intention will be to trace a common set of concerns, assumptions, and oppositional binaries (national/international, traditional/modern, rural/urban, and so on) as they cut across political, economic, and social domains in late Soviet Central Asia, from the top levels of state policy-making to the mundane and intimate dynamics of daily life. The theme of consumption and the fate of Central Asian material culture under Soviet auspices will serve as a unifying thread that links together discussions and practices at these various levels. Apart from its necessity for answering questions about the availability of goods and the ways in which they were produced and consumed, this cross-section approach has the potential to reveal some of the many ways that discourses about ethnicity, culture, and modernity were reproduced, disputed, expanded, and realigned as they moved among actors and institutions in post-war Central Asia. By exploring the operation of these discourses within multiple

registers simultaneously, it is possible to detect the emergence of a contested but shared set of signs, categories, and meanings by the last decades of Soviet rule, constituting a local cultural world that was simultaneously Central Asian and Soviet.

Consumption

Consumption in Soviet Central Asia, as in many other contexts worldwide, served as a forum for self-fashioning and social communication – a stage on which competing self-identifications and ethnic and cultural affiliations could be performed, disputed, and brought into dialogue. Although endemic shortages and sporadic access to goods placed certain hard limits on consumer choice in the Soviet Union, a growing range of products nevertheless became available to Central Asians as part of the Soviet state’s efforts to improve standards of living in the wake of the Second World War. Central Asians took advantage of this new availability to selectively utilize the goods on offer through the Soviet planned economy in the formulation and expression of particular identities, social affiliations, and cultural values. The broadening horizons of consumer choice set off a series of debates about proper consumer behavior in the Soviet press and public sphere, hinging on the proper ways of expressing and balancing culturedness and ethnic authenticity. At the same time, a whole array of less overt social pressures – encouragement, disparagement, ridicule – influenced consumer behavior within Central Asian families and neighborhood communities. In the circumstances created by Soviet censorship of the written word and the politically charged Communist Party discourses of modernization, culturedness, and nationality, consumer practices and the debates about them became a unique forum in which individuals and communities could elaborate competing visions of what it meant to be Central Asian under modern (and socialist) conditions.

Defining “consumer culture” in Soviet Central Asia. While the USSR’s reputation for chronic economic shortages was not unearned, studies of consumer culture in Russia and the Eastern bloc have

demonstrated that consumption nevertheless offers a productive lens through which to view socialist states and societies. One side of this developing literature is the study of the Soviet state's attitudes toward consumption, including the changing rhetoric in the official Soviet press about consumer activities. Researchers in this field have pointed to the shift during the Stalin-era mid-1930s toward a more permissive official view of consumption, with state rhetoric presenting consumer goods and even certain luxury items – “champagne, cognac, caviar, chocolate, and perfume” – as important components of the newly “cultured” lifestyles that socialism had brought to the laboring classes.³ For the post-war period, a handful of studies have focused on the tension between the expanding availability of consumer goods and state efforts to didactically “guide” and regulate consumer behavior during the Khrushchev era (1953-1964).⁴ But a more recent, and still emerging, side to this literature attempts to deal with consumption from the standpoint of its unique social dynamics and subjective dimensions within a socialist economy. A number of researchers have begun to examine some of the meaningful opportunities for agency and consumer choice that emerged in the late Soviet period in spite of the state's control of the economy and its intrusive efforts to “educate” consumer tastes, from the addition of personalizing objects to domestic spaces to the non-conformist fashions of the *stiliagi* youth.⁵ As Krisztina Fehervary has observed with reference to the case of Communist Hungary, an exclusive focus on shortage might prevent us from examining the goods that *were* available and the relationships

³ Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003), 33; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1992), 219-230; Karen Kettering, “‘Ever More Cosy and Comfortable’: Stalinism and the Soviet Domestic Interior, 1928-1938,” *Journal of Design History* 10/2 (1997): 119-135; Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁴ Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61/2 (Summer 2002): 211-252; Christine Varga-Harris, “Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era,” *Journal of Social History* (Spring 2008): 561-589.

⁵ Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 227-268; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 158-159.

consumers developed with them. Even as firm limits on consumers' ability to access and obtain desired goods persisted, Fehervary states, it was nonetheless true that "subjectivities, identities, and social relations became increasingly shaped by and through an ever-increasing volume of commodified goods in everyday life" in the decades after the Second World War. In other words, consumer practices in the late Soviet period, in spite of their peculiarities, shared many of their trajectories with the developing consumer cultures of Western Europe and the U.S. during the same period.⁶

Perhaps even more in need of explanation, though, is why Central Asia in particular might offer fruitful ground for a study of consumption and consumer culture. As a historically Muslim region of the USSR and the site of violent clashes between state policies and local ways of life in the 1920s and 1930s – the campaign to unveil Central Asian women, the attack on Islamic institutions, agricultural collectivization and the sedentarization of nomads – Central Asia might seem to be a curious site for a study of interior decoration and changing fashions.⁷ Two factors, however, combine to make consumer culture not just an interesting curiosity in Central Asia, but pivotal to understanding the late Soviet experience in the region. First, from the mid-1930s on, Soviet institutions in Central Asia devoted themselves to manufacturing not only "modern," European-style goods of the sort that were being sold to populations throughout the USSR, but also a set of locally specific, "national"-style goods – articles of clothing, items of furniture, and household implements that were modeled in form or ornamentation after objects of pre-revolutionary Central Asian material culture. This fact in itself meant that Central

⁶ Krisztina Fehervary, "Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51/2 (2009): 433.

⁷ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling Under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Niccolo Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928-1934," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 45/1-2 (2004): 137-192; Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine 1921-1934*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Yale University, 2010).

Asian consumers often faced meaningful choices – at minimum, between “European-style” and “national-style” objects – in spite of the shortages and difficulties of access that plagued consumption in the Soviet Union. Second, the distinction between “European-style” and “national-style” goods was the subject of ideologically charged discussions within Soviet institutions and the local-language press, which folded them into Soviet discourses about modernization on the one hand and the elaboration of national cultural traditions on the other. As a result, an individual’s decision to purchase one kind of good or another – a European-style table or a low Uzbek *xontaxta*, a modern knee-length skirt or a more modest “national dress” – became freighted with a great deal of symbolic meaning from the perspective of both official Soviet and local Central Asian discourses of backwardness, modernity, authenticity, and ethnic identity.

In this sense, Soviet Central Asia in the post-war decades (roughly from 1945 to 1985) fulfilled the conditions of a “consumer culture” in at least one of its definitions: a situation in which there was enough meaningful consumer choice (in the sense of both the quantitative variety of goods and the symbolic significance those goods carried) that the decision to purchase and use certain goods instead of others began to serve a communicative and signifying function, becoming a component of self-presentations as well as a topic of social contestation. This definition draws on Baudrillard’s characterization of consumer culture as a situation in which objects come to be valued not (only) as themselves, but as signs – not solely or even primarily for their functionality, but for their communicative value and their positioning within a system of signifiers.⁸ Within such a system, Baudrillard notes, objects serve not only their specific functional use but also a semantic purpose in which they are interchangeable with any number of other objects: “A washing machine *serves* as equipment and *plays* as an element of comfort, or of prestige, etc. ... Here all sorts of objects can be

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Objects,” *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 21-22.

substituted for the washing machine as a signifying element.”⁹ Likewise, in the context of Soviet Central Asia, a wide variety of functionally distinct objects – cooking utensils, carpets, shoes, dresses, bookshelves – were enlisted in the task of signifying modernity or ethnic authenticity, positioning oneself in terms of social status or cultural development, and communicating membership in a local Central Asian community or a transnational “European” one.

Of course, there are other ways in which researchers have defined and analyzed consumption which are less applicable to the Soviet Central Asian case. Ol’ga Gurova has argued that Soviet consumption practices fundamentally differed from those in a Western-style “consumer culture” in at least one important respect: Soviet shortages obliged consumers to reuse, hand down, and repair old objects, in contrast to a capitalist system in which “consumption is associated with the destruction of the thing and the most rapid completion possible of its functional cycle.”¹⁰ In the same spirit, a number of researchers have employed definitions that inextricably link consumer culture to a capitalist economic system, seeming to exclude the Soviet case from consideration altogether.¹¹ But as Fehevary observes, the differences between market economies and the socialist economies of the post-war Soviet bloc, which were “centrally planned, but nonetheless commodified and monetized,” did not prevent the emergence of certain similarities in consumers’ experiences and the social freight they acquired.¹² These similarities included the availability of at least some meaningful choice about what to buy and use, the attribution of individual consumption choices with symbolic significance, and the emergence of an overarching system in which identities and cultural affiliations were to a considerable degree

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰ Ol’ga Gurova, “The Life Span of Things in Soviet Society,” *Russian Studies in History* 48/1 (Summer 2009): 46-57.

¹¹ See, for example, Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (March 2005): 869; Stephen W. Silliman and Thomas A. Witt, “The Complexities of Consumption: Eastern Pequot Cultural Economics in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *Historical Archaeology* 44/4 (2010): 49.

¹² Fehevary, “Goods and States,” 429.

mediated by the purchase and use of certain objects. It is in this sense, privileging consumer activities and their social and cultural consequences rather than the operations of capitalist economies, producers, and advertisers, that I will be utilizing the terms “consumption” and “consumer culture” in this dissertation.

Consumption as a field for ethnic expression and cultural contestation. As something resembling a consumer culture developed in Central Asia over the course of the post-war period, the realm of consumer goods and the discourses about them became a major, visible, public arena within which questions about the relationship between Central Asian culture and Soviet modernity, between ethno-cultural distinctiveness and socialist internationalism, between “globalizing” interconnectedness and local uniqueness could be explored and played out. Why would discussions about consumption in particular become such an important field for consideration of larger questions of Central Asian ethnicity, culture, and community? There are three answers to this question, one specific to the Soviet context, one relating to the social and cultural dynamics of consumption more generally, and one deriving from the way consumer choice may shift the ground for expressions of ethnic difference.

First, from the Soviet standpoint, discussions about consumption constituted an arena in which surprisingly expansive room for disagreement and for the expression of a variety of contradictory positions existed within the parameters of permitted Soviet discourse. One reason for this was that consumer goods production and consumer demand were, frankly, relatively low-priority topics from the point of view of Soviet policy-makers. For the most part, these were not issues on which the Soviet state staked its identity and legitimacy, and thus were inherently more negotiable than other issues connected with Central Asian culture and identity – the replacement of “feudal” economies and nomadism with collectivized agriculture, the constriction of Islamic practice, and the incorporation of women into public life and the workplace – about which no public dispute was permitted. The state’s unusual flexibility in this arena also derived from the fact that Central Asian material culture frequently

was placed under the aegis of either Soviet artistic policy or Soviet nationalities policy, two policy realms in which a special dispensation was granted for pre-revolutionary traditions. Both art and “national culture” were, to varying degrees at different moments in Soviet history, exempted from the requirement to adhere to standards of modernization and socialist ideological correctness.¹³ The state’s decision to produce Central Asian-style goods thus laid the groundwork for broader disputes about the appropriate role of traditional culture in modern life – whether locally particularistic goods were to be gradually replaced with modern (read: European-style) goods or whether they should be preserved as a repository of uniquely valuable cultural practices and ideals.

Even when Cold War-era competition with the West and contests for international prestige made the fulfillment of consumer demand a higher-profile and more pressing goal for the Soviet Union, representatives of the state remained deeply ambivalent about consumption. In particular, during the Brezhnev era, many officials and Soviet cultural figures began to invoke a sober traditionalism and a reassertion of local national culture as antidotes to the quicksand dangers of consumerism, modernity, and the younger generation’s disruptive obsession with Western products. In Central Asia, as we shall see, this official fear about the destabilizing effects of consumer culture provided a kind of back door for the rehabilitation of a variety of traditionalist values – female modesty, the authority of elders over youth, the preferability of Central Asian-style over European-style consumption practices – within the ostensibly state-controlled public forum of the local-language Soviet press (Figure 0.5). The Soviet state’s fundamental ambivalence about consumption created spaces of uncertainty within official rhetoric and policy, and within these gaps it was possible to explore ideas about ethnicity and cultural belonging that would not have been possible elsewhere.

¹³ On the prioritization of aesthetic standards rooted in Russian intelligentsia values over ideological correctness in the fields of art and literature, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1992), 239-249.



Figure 0.5. Satire of consumption and generational tensions in Soviet Central Asia. Caption: “From a young age, they have spoiled their children. Here is the result: they have reaped what they sowed.” Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Sep. 1965).

In a more generalized vein, consumption's role as a stage for the disputation of ethnicity, culture, and modernity in Central Asia derived from the way that the social dynamics of consumption brought individual and collective values into dialogue. As already mentioned, Baudrillard's theorization of consumption as an act of signification, of creating and expressing symbolic meanings, points to the ways that consumer goods may come to stand in for less tangible social values. In Soviet Central Asia, the cut of a dress or jacket, the contours of a piece of furniture, the color, pattern, and material of a textile, the local or import provenance of an object all existed within a dense web of associations that linked certain consumer goods to modernity and a "universal" European culture and others to tradition and ethnic distinctiveness. These goods could thus serve as raw materials with which consumers could construct particular presentations of themselves or seek to express certain cultural values or group affiliations, and the sheer diversity of available goods meant that individuals had a varied palette from which to choose, with nearly endless possibilities for selection and recombination. Yet it would be a mistake to imagine consumer choice in Central Asia as a purely individual affair, and even more so to assume that it always entailed an individualistic ethos of self-expression and self-fulfillment. Instead, such choices shared in and were influenced by a social dialogue, were exposed to social surveillance and carried social repercussions. Recent sociological and anthropological literature has emphasized the way that consumer goods become an element of a public, socially positioned self, constructed by the individual but read and judged by his or her neighbors, peers, co-workers, and family members.¹⁴ In this sense, consumption can be imagined as a process by which disagreements about intangible cultural

¹⁴ Some examples of this approach include Lynn Schler, "Bridewealth, Guns, and Other Status Symbols: Immigration and Consumption in Colonial Douala," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16/2 (December 2003): 213-234; Margaret Purser, "Consumption as Communication in Nineteenth-Century Paradise Valley, Nevada," *Historical Archaeology* 26/3 (1992): 105-116; Laura R. Oswald, "Culture Swapping: Consumption and the Ethnogenesis of Middle-Class Haitian Immigrants," *Journal of Consumer Research* 25/4 (March 1999): 303-318; Amy Stambach, "Evangelism and Consumer Culture in Northern Tanzania," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73/4 (Oct. 2000): 171-179. On theories of the "performative self," see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959); and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

ideals, identities, and values were relocated from the sphere of overt and public politics to the intimate domains of everyday social interaction. Disputes about the gendered ideal of Central Asian femininity, about how to convey culturedness and modernity, and about the appropriate parameters of ethnic self-expression were enacted in microcosm through the choices individuals made about what to wear and display, and through the encouragement, disparagement, or ridicule these choices encountered from their neighbors in the local social sphere.

Finally, the symbolic weight that consumer decisions carry in a variety of contexts seems to be only augmented in conditions of highly politicized ethnic and cultural difference, in the presence of the sort of “cultural bifurcation” or “cultural dualism” that may be found in colonial situations, among ethnic minorities or immigrant communities within a dominant culture, within local cultures under pressure from the “globalizing” spread of Western products, and likewise among the Central Asian peoples of the Soviet Union.¹⁵ On the one hand, consumer choice may grow even more laden with political and social significance in these conditions, as decisions about what to buy, wear, use, and display are linked to uneasy questions about ethnic affiliations and cultural loyalties. In Zanzibar following its 1964 revolution, for instance, the adoption of new Western fashions among urban youth came to be criticized by representatives of the governing party on political grounds, as symbols of the “struggle between West and East” and of Western-looking attitudes that recalled “the ‘slavish’ mentality of the colonial period of darkness.”¹⁶ At the same time, the transmission of goods and practices across cultural boundaries has a tendency to destabilize the established meanings both of the newly transmitted objects and of those pre-existing within the local culture, as both were reconfigured in relation to one another. Michel de Certeau has posited that the meanings attached to objects are inherently unstable, liable to be utilized

¹⁵ The term “cultural dualism” is used in James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 86.

¹⁶ Thomas Burgess, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles over youth and citizenship in revolutionary Zanzibar,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35/2-3 (2002): 299, 302.

and experienced in unanticipated and uncontrollable ways by their consumers.¹⁷ In circumstances of cross-cultural transmission, this effect could be compounded further, producing what Aliakbar Jafari, in a study of contemporary Iranian youth consumption, refers to as “information overload” and a growing “excess of signs and images,” providing a proliferation of new semiotic possibilities for consumers.¹⁸ Amy Stambach has observed a similar phenomenon in Northern Tanzania, where the introduction of Western consumer products resulted not in cultural homogenization, but rather in “the deployment of commodities within multiple, sometimes alternative, registers of value and modes of transaction.”¹⁹ In short, the interplay of two distinct regimes of material culture meant that consumers were presented with a proliferation of options, with an expanded palette of goods and discourses on which to draw in formulating their self-presentations and social relationships. But given the politicization of both ethnic and non-ethnic self-expression, the expanding horizons of choice presented consumers with a series of double-binds, as the social repercussions and political stakes of their decisions were ratcheted up dramatically. In post-war Central Asia, women in particular were faced with a multi-layered, situationally shifting, and often contradictory set of demands on their dress and behavior; they were expected to be modern but also visibly Central Asian, up-to-date in their fashions but also modest, active as homemaker-consumers but also resistant to the allure of “excessive” consumption.

The combination of fluidity and volatility that burgeoning consumer choice brought to expressions of ethnicity and cultural affiliation meant that innumerable microscopic battles over the relationship between Central Asianness, modernity, authenticity, and community were fought on the

¹⁷ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiii.

¹⁸ Aliakbar Jafari, “Two Tales of a City: An Exploratory Study of Cultural Consumption among Iranian Youth,” *Iranian Studies* 40/3 (June 2007): 374.

¹⁹ Stambach, “Evangelism and Consumer Culture in Northern Tanzania,” 177. For other examples of the deployment of European goods in unanticipated ways in colonial contexts, see Lynn Schler, “Bridewealth, Guns, and Other Status Symbols: Immigration and Consumption in Colonial Douala”; Jean Comaroff, “The Empire's Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject,” in D. Howes, ed., *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (Routledge: 1996), 24-32.

ground of consumption, in discussions about the meanings of individual articles of clothing and pieces of furniture and in everyday conversations about who was buying what and what kind of person it made them. Soviet nationalities policy since the 1920s, with its efforts to codify and reify Central Asian national cultures, had already fostered a degree of cultural self-awareness among Central Asians alongside the idea of an “objectifiable culture.”²⁰ But by being externalized and located in consumable, re-combinable objects, concepts of modernity and tradition, Europeanness and Central Asianness, lost some of their zero-sum quality and instead became the raw materials out of which a composite identity and a place in contemporary Soviet society could be fashioned. A peculiarity of consumption relative to other modes of self-expression is its piecemeal quality. Self-presentations, often, did not hinge on the decision to purchase a single object, but rather were fashioned cumulatively over time, in a way that encouraged eclecticism and multi-dimensionality. In these conditions, self-identifications grew less and less taken for granted and instead became complex, composite, and, to a certain extent, self-conscious. Theorists of consumerism in other contexts have speculated that consumer cultures tend to highlight the constructedness and performativity of all identities.²¹ As Laura Oswald has noted in her discussion of “culture swapping” among Haitian immigrants to the United States, “Consumption constitutes not only a symbolic text but a kind of theatrical space in which the ethnic subject plays out personal and social identity.”²² For Central Asians, ethnicity and cultural affiliation, whether locally oriented or staked on membership in a “universal” European modernity, came to be subject to continuous performance through the purchase, display, and use of certain kinds of goods.

²⁰ David MacKenzie Abramson, “From Soviet to Mahalla: Community and Transition in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Indiana University: 1998), 222.

²¹ Mary Louise Roberts, “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,” *The American Historical Review* 103/3 (Jun. 1998): 843; Davarian Baldwin, “From the Washtub to the World: Madam C.J. Walker and the ‘Re-creation’ of Race Womanhood, 1900-1935,” *Modern Girl Around the World*, ed. Alys Weinbaum et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 61.

²² Oswald, “Culture Swapping,” 313, 315.

Ethnicity

If Central Asia may be productively compared to a number of other cases worldwide in which consumer culture became the stage for a fraught politics of ethnic identification, the problem of ethnic difference nevertheless manifested itself in an unusual way in the Soviet Union due to the unprecedented nature of the Soviet state's policies toward non-Russian peoples. Terry Martin has described the Soviet Union as an "affirmative action empire," in which the "forms of nationhood" were granted to the many constituent peoples of the former Russian empire with the goal of representing the Soviet state as a protector of national self-determination rather than an imperial oppressor.²³ But as these carefully delimited "forms of nationhood" were taken up and elaborated within republic-level institutions and in the local public sphere, they quickly became entangled with more substantive differences in practices and values, family and social structures, and other persistent elements of ethno-cultural difference. The question of the relationship between "nationality" in its official Soviet definition and the lived experience of ethnic and cultural difference thus demands further exploration. This problem encompasses two distinct but interconnected questions, one related to the state's implementation of nationalities policy in the non-Russian republics and the second related to the elaboration of Soviet identity categories on a local, grassroots, and social level. First, to what extent did Soviet nationalities policy, in theory or in practice, provide room for ethnic and cultural difference, for "being Soviet" in a culturally distinctive way? In what capacity and by what definitions could one be "Uzbek" or "Kyrgyz" while remaining socialist, internationalist, and/or a good Soviet citizen? Second, why did Central Asians as individuals invest in these Soviet-curated identity categories, and to what uses did they put them in the course of the post-war decades? The lens of consumption and consumer culture offers new insight into both of these questions, illuminating some of the processes through

²³ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-3.

which “national” identities became the site of a dense array of cultural and affective meanings by the final decades of Soviet rule.

Nationalities policy endgames: Cultural homogenization or socialist multiculturalism. When Lenin and Stalin set out the fundamental principles of Soviet nationalities policy – the state-sponsored promotion of distinctive national languages, territorial boundaries, and indigenous elites – they were consciously rejecting an alternative approach popular within Marxist circles at the time, which advocated disregarding national distinctions in favor of class solidarity under the banner of socialist internationalism.²⁴ In a certain sense, Soviet nationalities policy functioned as a self-imposed check on the state’s efforts to homogenize the ethnically varied populations of the USSR, which policy-makers guessed would be read as colonialist and Russifying, only inflaming nationalist movements of resistance. Instead, the policy path adopted by early Soviet leaders legitimated and to some extent even protected certain facets of non-Russian peoples’ ethnic and cultural difference. But these protections were neither clear nor absolute. The category of the “national” in Soviet usage excluded differences in socio-economic structures, political traditions, and religion, all of which were subject to transformation under state projects of “modernization” and “building socialism.” Nationalities policy did not prevent the Soviet state from undertaking massive and destructive projects of transformation on an all-union level, like agricultural collectivization, nor from striving to completely eliminate ways of life specific to non-Russian populations, like nomadism. No protections were offered for practices that were regarded as religious in origin, like the veiling of women practiced among some of the USSR’s Muslim populations.

All of this is well known, and the methods by which the Soviet state cultivated national borders, languages, and “identities” among populations that had previously lacked them, including among the peoples of Central Asia, have been comprehensively described in works by Yuri Slezkine, Terry Martin,

²⁴ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 2-3.

Francine Hirsch, and others.²⁵ Nonetheless, the extent to which the persistence of “national” differences in culture, daily life, and practice was permissible within Soviet thinking and policy remains one of the most poorly understood dimensions of nationalities policy and of the Soviet experience in the non-Russian republics. This is, I think, for good reason, as these issues were mired in confusion and disagreement even in discussions among Soviet thinkers and policy-makers themselves. Studies of Soviet nationalities have typically emphasized two facts which seem to indicate a tightly circumscribed scope for permitted cultural difference within Soviet politics. First, the types of national cultural expression most famously promoted by the Soviet state tended to fall within the closely regulated realm of high culture – art, literature, symphonic music, ballet, and the other cultural products of the (state-affiliated) national intelligentsias – rather than in the invisible and pervasive realms of meaning, belief, and practice that constitute “culture” in a more contemporary and anthropological sense.²⁶ Terry Martin argues that such an anthropological usage is, in fact, inappropriate to understanding Soviet “national cultures” in their official formulation, which he says failed to include “any of the features now typically associated with national cultures, such as distinctive patterns of belief and social practices.”²⁷ He proposes that the Soviet phrase *natsional’naia kul’tura* should not be translated as “national culture,” but as a phrase less suggestive of deep and pervasive differences in ways of living, such as

²⁵ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53/2 (Summer 1994): 414-452; Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

²⁶ William Sewell identifies this distinction in English-language uses of the term “culture” as well. The Soviet usage closely approximates the idea of “culture as a distinct sphere of activity” limited to institutions of “art, music, theater, fashion, literature, religion, media, and education.” In the field of anthropology since the 1960s, by contrast, culture is typically understood as a more pervasive structuring force, “a system of symbols and meanings,” a “toolkit” for everyday social practice, or, in Sewell’s own preferred definition, “a network of semiotic relations cast across society.” See William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 41-49.

²⁷ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 183.

“national identity” or “symbolic ethnicity.”²⁸ Second, the Stalinist formula “national in form, socialist in content” has been taken as an accurate encapsulation of the hollowed out and politically convenient ways that the Soviet state deployed symbols of national identity. Francine Hirsch, for example, cites “folk songs and tales about Lenin,” “Turkmen rugs embroidered with Stalin’s image,” and “folk dances about collectivization” as quintessential examples of the political instrumentalization inherent in the Soviet ideal of national cultures.²⁹ Writing on the Soviet experience in Kazakhstan specifically, Bhavna Dave has argued that the Soviet framework for the “nation” was so centrally directed and carefully controlled that it “stripped its members of subjectivity in shaping their identities, aspirations and interests” and transformed even the ostensibly subjective “national character” into “an ascribed element, to be reified and folklorized.”³⁰ Douglas Northrop goes even further in asserting, on the basis of his analysis of the 1927 unveiling campaign in Uzbekistan, that the USSR should be understood as a form of empire which sought to eradicate “marks of colonial difference.”³¹ According to this reading, Soviet nationalities policy created only a tokenistic, centrally directed, and ultimately superficial space for expressions of non-Russian ethnicity and culture, in which the Soviet state aimed to decouple “nationality” not only from anti-imperial secessionism and exclusivist nationalism, but also from any deep-rooted, emotive, or lived cultural content.

Yet while this tightly constrained, formalistic understanding of nationalities reflects an important – and one might say, at least during the Stalin era, dominant – strain of official thinking and practice, there existed within Soviet ideology, nationality policy, and public discourse the seeds of a quite different approach to non-Russian peoples and their national cultures. Within official and

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 270.

³⁰ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 21.

³¹ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 29.

professional Soviet discussions about art, literature, and – particularly relevant to this dissertation – the production of Central Asian-style “national goods” and artisanal folk handicrafts, ethnic and cultural distinctiveness were increasingly framed not only as hollow “forms” for the conveyance of socialist content, but also as innately valuable sources of color, novelty, beauty, and authenticity, in both the cultural and emotional senses of the term. Yuri Slezkine glosses this tendency as Soviet “ethnophilia,” but while it was certainly not free from overtones of Orientalizing exoticism, it also served as a gateway to a more permissive and optimistic approach to Central Asian cultures that yielded real effects in the lives of individuals in the region.³² Proponents of this line of argument often reframed the much-ballyhooed “dialectic of the national and international” as a mutually reinforcing relationship between what was locally particularistic and what was universally human. Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, one of the most celebrated icons of Soviet internationalism in the field of literature, made this connection sound natural and effortless in a 1967 essay in *Voprosy Literatury*: “Literary works are nourished by their link with the writer’s native land, people, and their most important everyday cares. This helps the writer be of universal interest, because all peoples and their attitudes have so much in common.”³³ Discussions of Central Asian folk crafts, too, drew a causal connection between their intimate connection to local traditions and ways of living and their ability to unite people across ethnic and national borders. Speaking before a meeting of the Uzbek artistic crafts union in 1958, a Ukrainian representative called on Central Asian producers of folk handicrafts to “bind them as tightly as possible to the life of the people, the everyday existence of the people, with its great heritage, its culture of the past,” and in so doing to “facilitate mutual understanding and connections among the peoples of the whole world.”³⁴

³² Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as Communal Apartment,” 415.

³³ Chingiz Aitmatov, “A Responsibility to the Future,” *The Time to Speak Out*, ed. Paul Garb and Galina Dzyubenko (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 16. His remarks were originally published in *Voprosy Literatury* no. 9 (1967).

³⁴ TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 593, 61-62.

While not necessarily contradicting the modernizing, evolutionary ideology at the root of state rhetoric in support of cultural homogenization, this second strain of Soviet nationalities discourse offered a decidedly different emphasis and tone, a different vision of the future and of the place of non-Russians (and particularly of the historically “backward” peoples of the USSR) within socialist modernity. Rather than obstacles to the achievement of a homogenized socialist culture, a visible, persistent Uzbekness or Kyrgyzness could be imagined as enriching and enlivening the Soviet “friendship of peoples.” This discourse had already existed in a nascent form during the Stalin era, but it reached its zenith in the Brezhnev-era 1970s and 1980s, when a Soviet Union-wide turn toward the past, toward nostalgia for pre-revolutionary and rural life and disillusionment with a depersonalized, mechanized, consumerist modernity kindled a new enthusiasm for folk culture.³⁵ In this context, appeals to traditional Central Asian aesthetics, practices, and values found fertile ground, and the utopian future of “internationalism” was increasingly framed less in terms of total cultural homogenization than in terms of the productive interchange of diverse cultures. In the words of a Soviet Kyrgyz scholar writing in 1982, the ideal was an “international community” in which each of the peoples of the USSR would nevertheless “maintain their ethnic distinctiveness.”³⁶ In the following chapters, I will show that discourses across all registers of Soviet and Central Asian public life, from official policy decrees to academic debates among artists and ethnographers to advertisements for particular goods in the Central Asian-language press, proposed with growing urgency that the danger posed by the winnowing away of Central Asian cultural distinctiveness was not merely a political one, manifested in the possibility of popular discontent or the rise of movements of anti-Soviet nationalism. Instead, they

³⁵ On the Brezhnev-era surge in interest in national culture and rural life in the Russian context, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

³⁶ T.U. Usabaliev, *Rukovodiashchaia rol' KPSS v ukreplenii edinstva internatsional'nogo i natsional'nogo v sovetskom sotsialisticheskom obraze zhizni* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo “Kyrgyzstan,” 1982), 26.

suggested, cultural homogenization would constitute an aesthetic and cultural impoverishment, a loss of the unique contributions that Central Asian cultures could make to the “treasure-house of world culture.”

Nor was this diversity-positive strain within Soviet thinking limited to mere rhetoric. It did not, to be sure, override coercive efforts at cultural transformation like the Soviet state’s repression of Islam in Central Asia, nor did it undo the effects of unveiling or the destructive de-nomadization campaign of the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, it had real effects both on the letter of Soviet policy and on what it meant to live in Central Asia under Soviet rule. Most directly, it authorized the work of ethnographers, artists, and art historians in the preservation of Central Asia’s material cultural past; not only permitted but incentivized indigenous Central Asian artisans from the pre-revolutionary period to continue their creative work under Soviet auspices; created the necessary institutions and official values for the transmission of these artisans’ expertise to new generations; and entrenched the production of nationally-specific consumer goods to the point that they were both available and, in the case of certain objects, in near-ubiquitous use among the Central Asian population fully through the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Simultaneously, this entrenchment of “national goods” and traditional-style material culture as a constituent part of life in Soviet Central Asia created opportunities for people to live, visibly, in non-standardized, non-homogenous ways, to assert a variety of ethnic and cultural self-identifications, to engage in locally-specific social and cultural practices and ways of life. It legitimated a certain carefully delimited but, in practice, quite expansive portion of Central Asians’ ethnic and cultural difference.

Rethinking Soviet nationalities from the bottom up: Ethnicity, culture, and the lived experience of difference. In this sense, the fact that Soviet institutions engaged in the mass production and sale of “national” Central Asian-style consumer goods by the post-war period does not merely add an additional item to the checklist of characteristics typically allotted to Soviet nationalities. The point is

not that Soviet national cultures consisted of state-curated national art, literature, opera, ballet, and so on – and also national consumer goods. The difference is a qualitative one. Central Asian-style consumer goods created a space for “national culture” that was both more intimate and more routinized than the high-cultural spectacles most often described in histories of Soviet nationalities (parades in ethnic costume, staged ethnic dance routines, operas and ballets based on local folklore). Consumer goods brought the idea of nationality out of the public-facing and politically regulated realms of the Soviet theater and printed page and into daily life, into private domestic spaces, onto the bodies of individuals. In turn, this created the preconditions for ethnic and cultural differences, both among various Central Asian populations and between Central Asians and Russians, to manifest themselves, palpably, in the practices and sensory experiences of daily life, in different ways of sitting and eating, receiving guests, arranging objects in the home, raising children, differentiating genders, practicing hygiene, conveying wealth and prestige. Objects both helped to constitute these differences and became invested with a thick array of overlapping meanings deriving from them. In the process, these “national” consumer goods became not merely interchangeable boundary markers or symbolic indicators of the categories of “Uzbek” or “Kyrgyz,” but rather nodes within a dense web of cultural values and significances. In Soviet terminology, they acquired weight and “content” rather than remaining hollow “forms” that could serve as empty vessels for state ideology; in my own terms, they linked Soviet-created categories of nationality to the lived experience of ethnicity and ethnic difference, and stretched the boundaries of Stalinist “national cultures” to accommodate the worlds of practice and meaning that approximate “culture” in its broadest sense.

Perhaps most pressing of all, then, is the need to revise our understanding of what Central Asian nationalities meant at the grassroots level, and in particular to correct the common misapprehension that Uzbekness, Kyrgyznes, and so on were, in their Soviet-era iterations, atypically thin, artificial, or state-controlled categories. Of course, the influence the Soviet state exercised over these categories

should by no means be underestimated. Even where local intelligentsia played an instrumental role in delimiting and defining Central Asian nationalities, state institutions and technologies of rule, from the census to the nationality line in the Soviet passport, served to reify these categories and make them ubiquitous.³⁷ But the danger arises when a state-centered understanding of Soviet nationality leads to the too-common result of an uncomprehending, vaguely dismissive attitude toward the national identities of late-Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, as if they are a Soviet ruse for which Central Asians have fallen, a set of identity categories somehow more manipulated and more inauthentic than the run-of-the-mill “constructed” identities and “invented” traditions we are accustomed to studying.³⁸ Bruce Grant aptly identifies the problem for scholars of the Soviet Union of accounting for a highly centralized state as the agent of identity-building and cultural construction: “What remains... is a popular sense that statist efforts at culture creation are diminished by their artificiality. As reconstructions imposed from above, they want for authenticity.”³⁹ The sense that Central Asian ethno-national identities were in some way limited or deficient is only compounded by the wave of post-Soviet scholarship concerned with accounting for the comparative “weakness” of Central Asian nationality categories in comparison to other Soviet nationalities and explaining their “failure” to politically mobilize under Gorbachev.⁴⁰ While these works are often insightful and interesting in their own right, the scholarly preoccupation with the moment of Soviet collapse has frequently resulted in a tendency to accept nationalist political

³⁷ Francine Hirsch, “Toward and Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” *Russian Review* 59/2 (2000): 213-219; Adeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Edgar, *Tribal Nation*.

³⁸ On “invented traditions” as a commonplace of contemporary cultural life, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³⁹ Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xii-xiii.

⁴⁰ See Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 88, 93; Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 156-166; Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

mobilization as the gold standard for measuring the substantiveness, social reality, and emotional heft attained by state-promoted identity categories, and to find Central Asian nationalities wanting in this respect.

In addition to looking at all of the ways in which Uzbekness and Kyrgyznes failed to do what nations are supposed to do, then, it is necessary to begin investigating the ways they actually functioned in social life during the Soviet period, which is to say as key fulcrums of identification, association, and dispute. In part, this requires shifting focus from the sphere of Soviet politics and the institutions of high culture, where the hand of the state lay the heaviest, to the local, the everyday, and the social realms. From this perspective, the Soviet terminology of “nationalities” may be an impediment more than an aid. The ways that the categories “Uzbek” and “Kyrgyz” operated on an intimate and everyday level by the post-war period often resembles the conditions of ethnic minority populations or immigrant communities within a dominant culture more than the patterns of nationalist mobilization. These “nationality” categories were omnipresent in daily life as indicators of difference, often felt through the offense and indignation accompanying the petty disrespects inflicted by the dominant (Russian or “European”) culture, carrying the affective weight of one’s “own” practices and familiar material realities, serving as a major group boundary of self-identification and possessing a social reality as the group within which most sociability occurred,⁴¹ but also as a locus of interpersonal and intergenerational conflict over issues of authenticity and acculturation – all without linking up in any straightforward way to a nationalist politics. To call these identifications de-politicized is too sweeping, ignoring the intricate and fraught politics of self-presentation and social interaction that played out daily in microcosm; what they were, instead, was unmoored from the political logic of nationalism. “Affirmative action empire”

⁴¹ Ronald Wixman makes the claim that Central Asians predominantly socialized among themselves rather than with Russians on the basis of late Soviet ethnographic research. See Ronald Wixman, “Ethnic Attitudes and Relations in Modern Uzbek Cities,” in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 161-162.

and “empire of nations” elegantly encapsulate the Soviet state’s political solution to the problem of difference – the management, classification, and governance of culturally distinctive populations.⁴² But the problem had a social dimension as well, to be solved through local and interpersonal rather than administrative means, consisting of the ways that difference was lived, articulated, expressed (or performed), and disputed in the course of daily inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic interactions. I am using the term “ethnicity” as shorthand for this social dimension of difference and the set of uncertainties surrounding it.

To be clear, I am not positing “ethnicity” and “culture” as immutable, naturalized, or ahistorical categories in contrast to the politically manipulated category of “nationality” in the Soviet sense. On the contrary, it is central to my argument that what I am calling ethnicity and culture were interwoven with Soviet language and typologies, with state-initiated nationalities discourses, and with political battles over identity. They were all of these things while also being identity categories that were inhabited rather than merely leveraged by Central Asians, that contained experiential and affective significances alongside their ascribed ones, that were forged in the fires of daily social interaction as well as in the policies and discourses of Soviet institutions. If the formulation “socialist in content, national in form” fails to accurately describe the lived component of Uzbekness or Kyrgyzness, it is equally incorrect to argue that seventy years of Soviet rule merely superimposed new labels and a revised set of ethnic boundaries over what was essentially an unreconstructed localism or traditionalism. As we shall see, the language and evaluative classifications of Soviet consumption discourse – not only “Uzbek” and “Kyrgyz,” “national” and “European,” but also concepts of culturedness, hygiene, and taste – in many cases became part of the fabric of daily conversations about consumption and part of the shared

⁴² Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper introduce the concept of “managing difference” as a key element of repertoires of imperial power. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

cultural givens of late Soviet Central Asian life. It is necessary, then, to deal with the ways, apart from resistance or self-interested appropriation, that Soviet nationality categories came to permeate and structure self-identifications, social boundary-drawings, even moral assessments among many Central Asians in the decades after the Second World War.

This intricate and unpredictable interplay between state-ascribed nationalities and socially constituted ethno-cultural identities demonstrates – if more evidence was required – that it is impossible to speak about the outcomes of Soviet policy, much less the experience of Soviet rule in a broader sense, without investigating, individually and in detail, the experiences of the non-Russian peoples and peripheral republics of the USSR. The fact is that the view from Moscow, even from its all-union institutions, tended to reflect Russian realities, and certain phenomena and processes taking place in the non-Russian republics are not merely muted or misconstrued in central documents but altogether invisible. The limitations of a Moscow-centered perspective have led some scholars to assume, for example, that a growing interest in Russian nationalism among Moscow elites, as occurred during the late Stalin era and again under Brezhnev, must necessarily have entailed a corresponding constriction of national expression in the non-Russian republics.⁴³ Yet in both cases, the result in the Central Asian republics was instead a sort of mirroring: attitudes and policies toward Russianness at the center were

⁴³ Terry Martin refutes this argument in *Affirmative Action Empire*, pointing out that “the rehabilitation of Russian national self-expression did not, however, involve a shift from nation-building to russification,” and that in fact “the cultivation of non-Russian national identity actually intensified after 1933.” Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 394. Nevertheless, the notion that any manifestations of Russian nationalism at the center must correspondingly result in a constriction of non-Russian cultural expression in the republics has proven to be curiously difficult to dispel, partially because it was so ubiquitous in scholarship produced before nationalities policy was well understood. Karen Kettinger makes this argument with reference specifically to the production of decorative crafts production with an Orientalist bent in Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 1930s: “These decorative works tended to reinforce *Russian* identity as civilized bearers of culture and did so at the expense of an internationalist *Soviet* identity in which all citizens, whatever their nationality, were considered equals.” Karen Kettinger, “Domesticating Uzbeks: Central Asians in Soviet decorative art of the twenties and thirties,” *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, material culture and the museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (New York: Routledge, 1998). On the basis of statements in the Russian press and the Politburo’s removal from office of the Ukrainian and Georgian party secretaries in the early 1970s, Yitzhak Brudny argues that the center took a firm stance against nationalist sentiment in any republic but the RSFSR after approximately 1972. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 97-101.

replicated as attitudes and policies toward Uzbekness, Kyrgyznes, and so on within their respective republics. In its most extreme form, the relationship between Russia and the non-Russian republics of the USSR suggests less a hub-and-spoke model than a kind of segmentation, the formation of distinct and relatively self-contained ethnic and cultural constituencies within the Soviet space, united by the letter of centralized policy directives and the pervasive power of state discourses, but elaborating them in locally particularistic directions.

In his piece “Bargaining Armenian-ness,” Maike Lehmann argues that Soviet nation-making and “national forms” need to be investigated not only from the perspective of the center (nationality policy) but also as a process happening “from below” (what Lehmann calls the “politics of national identity”).⁴⁴ While central authorities set the boundaries for the discussion, he says, at the local level people were engaged in “testing and challenging of the space allowed for ‘national form.’” But the concept of “bargaining” is not quite suitable for describing how this latter process took place in Central Asia. There, local and grassroots contributions to the Soviet concept of national identity and testing of the boundaries of acceptable “national forms” took place not so much in dialogue with central conceptions of nationality as to one side of them. The concept of “negotiation” suggests an open advocacy of divergent positions and a two-way dialogue, both of which were absent in the relationship between local Central Asian and official Soviet discourses. The dynamic was not one of open debate, of push and pull between local and central elites, or of clearly formulated oppositional positions; instead, it involved an adoption and subsequent distension of central rhetoric and ideals. The process was tacit if not necessarily covert, and it frequently did not feed back into the way that Moscow officials spoke to and about Central Asian peoples. To the extent that Central Asian values interacted with Moscow-based ones, they did so quietly and, for the most part, purely locally, generating a system of public values that

⁴⁴ Maike Lehmann, “Bargaining Armenian-ness: National Politics of Identity in the Soviet Union after 1945,” in *Representations on the Margins of Europe*, ed. Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba (New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), 167-168.

became widespread and even dominant within the region itself but that affected discussions in Moscow almost not at all. The outcome was the creation of a second, connected but distinct field of values and discourse that more or less mirrored the language and signifiers of official Soviet discourse but occasionally sounds dissonant when juxtaposed with it directly. The dynamics that the experience of post-war Soviet Central Asia illustrates with particular clarity, then, are the more subtly transformative effects of distension, cultural translation, and the semiotic entanglements that these processes produced.

Parameters of the project: A cross-section of post-war Soviet Central Asia

The following chapters will trace the emergence of a uniquely Soviet Central Asian consumer culture, the carving out of an officially legitimated space for the elaboration of Central Asian ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, and the ways these two processes interlocked with each other over the course of the Soviet period. Although the primary chronological focus of this dissertation will rest on second half of the Soviet era, from the 1950s through the 1980s, the roots of the policy of producing “national” consumer goods, as well as the first debates about the relationship between the “national” and the “international,” originated in an earlier period of Soviet rule. The years of the Stalin era (1928-1953), in particular, will provide a necessary pre-history for developments in the post-war decades, and will be addressed in Chapters 1 and 2. The bulk of my analysis, however, will be dedicated to the decades of the Khrushchev era (1953-1964) and the Brezhnev era (1964-1982). While Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization efforts spawned a series of challenges to the Stalin era’s accommodating approach to Central Asian national goods and cultural expression, the late 1960s and 1970s witnessed the fullest and most enthusiastic development of the “diversity-positive” strain in Soviet nationalities thinking. At the latter end of my chronological scope, while many elements of my analysis remain valid through the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and in a few cases even beyond that, I will not deal extensively with

developments after the mid-1980s, when revelations of widespread corruption within Uzbekistan's party leadership alongside Gorbachev's *glasnost* created an increasingly complex and rapidly changing field of public discourse about nationality and culture in Central Asia.⁴⁵

Geographically speaking, my research will focus on the Uzbek and Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics, although examples from other Soviet republics, both within Central Asia and beyond, will be included intermittently and will demonstrate the wider applicability of many of the policies and processes I describe. The choice of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which differed from one another in terms of population size and demographics, the pre-Soviet heritage of sedentary agriculture as opposed to nomadic pastoralism, and the degree of attention and investment each received from Moscow, will provide a means of exploring the ways that Soviet approaches and their outcomes could both differ and converge in two quite dissimilar Central Asian republics. In general, local advocacy for cultural traditions and expressions of cultural distinctiveness tended to be noticeably stronger in the Uzbek case than in Kyrgyzstan. This may have resulted from a number of factors: the greater interest among state officials and Russian artistic experts in Uzbek artisanal crafts than in Kyrgyz ones, which was itself connected to the fact that the latter were less commercially developed and less export-oriented prior to the revolution; the higher level of indigenization of the state and party apparatus in Uzbekistan; the comparatively traumatic and culturally disruptive experience of collectivization in Kyrgyzstan, exacerbated by the continued stigmatization of nomadism and its traditions as irretrievably "backward"

⁴⁵ Secondary literature on this period paints a complex picture that demands further research. The corruption that had flourished in the Uzbek party and state apparatus under Brezhnev led to a crackdown under Andropov, followed by a wave of party expulsions and arrests under Gorbachev, with posts formerly occupied by Uzbeks now filled, according to Kathleen Collins, by "a cadre of several thousand Moscow appointees – predominantly Russian." The revelation of Uzbekistan's "cotton scandal," in particular, may have led to renewed central suspicions of Central Asian cultures, as corruption was linked to "clan" activities and imagined as a particularly Central Asian "survival of the past." See Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 113-115. On the other hand, in an early post-Soviet study, Donald S. Carlisle argued that Andropov and Gorbachev's crackdown "invigorated national consciousness" in Uzbekistan and encouraged the development of a new "'defensive' or 'reactive' national identity." See Donald S. Carlisle, "Power and Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan: From Stalin to Gorbachev," in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 116-117.

even during the post-Stalin decades. In spite of these differences, however, the parallels between the two cases remain striking. Soviet policies from the 1930s sought to bolster the production of “national goods” and locally distinctive “folk artistic crafts” in both cases, without regard for their pre-existing commercial or export viability, and in a way that did not depend on the lobbying of a local Central Asian elite. In both cases, discussions within Soviet institutions and the local-language press made consumer goods the focus of forays into the relationship between the national and the international, ethnic authenticity and modernity. Finally, among both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz by the late Soviet period, consumer choice became both an individual balancing act, inviting the selection and combination of European-style and national-style goods in such a way as to present a particular kind of self, and a seed for social divides on the basis of wealth, urban or rural residency, generation, and cultural identification.

In terms of subject matter, my discussion of the dynamics of consumption will focus on certain selected categories of consumer goods, particularly clothing, household implements, decorative objects, and furnishings. This means that I will largely omit discussion of foodstuffs as well as the consumption of popular media products like music, film, and television. The reasons for this are almost entirely logistical; the production of processed foods and cultural media were subject to different sets of institutions than the Soviet industrial ministries and artisanal cooperatives that produced clothing and furniture, and each had its own peculiarities in terms of state priorities and consumption dynamics. My omission should not be taken to mean, however, that these other kinds of products were unimportant in the articulation of ethnic identities and cultural affiliations in late Soviet Central Asia. On the contrary, the evidence I have seen suggests that they were subject to very similar processes to the ones I describe in this dissertation. The Soviet state’s efforts to accommodate Central Asian consumers, for example, extended to the opening of cafeterias serving “national dishes” and even to the production and sale of convenience food products (*polufabrikaty*) intended to expedite home cooking of Central

Asian cuisine, including pre-made dough for Kazakh *manty* and noodles for *laghman*.⁴⁶ Likewise, in the course of my oral history interviews, many respondents spontaneously brought up the subject of food and connected it both to ethnic and cultural identifications and to social divides within the Central Asian population. One Uzbek respondent, for instance, mentioned that her family (which she identified as “intelligentsia” and “Europeanized”) routinely ate sausage during the late Soviet period, in contrast to “many traditional families” who avoided sausage due to the Islamic prohibition against eating pork.⁴⁷ An elderly Kyrgyz woman explained to me that the Kyrgyz national dish *beshbarmak* is delicious only when prepared in the traditional way, with horse meat, rather than with lamb or beef as has become popular in contemporary urban Bishkek restaurants, and requested that I write this fact down in my notes.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, each of these topics could constitute its own study, and I cannot offer a detailed examination of them here.

Finally, one note about my use of terms like “tradition,” “modernity,” “Soviet,” and “Central Asian” throughout this dissertation: it is not my intention to present any of these categories as essential and unchanging. “Tradition” and “modernity,” in my use, are not meant to convey chronologically distinguished cultural essences or sets of practices; rather, these were discursive categories that were used by various actors, both “official” and “unofficial,” to describe a set of oppositions and tensions within 20th-century Central Asian society. In cases where I attempt to distinguish “local” or “Central Asian” phenomena from “Soviet” ones, my aim is to contrast central state policies as they were enunciated and implemented elsewhere, above all in Russia, with the distinctiveness of the Central Asian Soviet experience. I firmly believe – and it is one of my primary arguments – that the line between values that were “Soviet” and those that were “Central Asian” was becoming increasingly blurred during

⁴⁶ See advertisements in *Iuzhnii Kazakhstan* [Chimkent], no. 28, 9 Feb. 1968, and 13 Apr. 1968.

⁴⁷ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

⁴⁸ Dinara Sultanbekova [pseudonym], personal interview, 21 Aug. 2014.

this period, but in making this argument I have felt the need to attempt to distinguish central from local ideas and phenomena in order to describe how they eventually overlapped and grew into one another.

The following chapters will thus attempt to trace the particular combination of production policies, consumption practices, and discourses about both that enabled the emergence of a distinct space for Central Asian ethno-cultural difference within the boundaries of Soviet belonging by the post-war period. Chapter 1 will provide a chronological overview of the Soviet policy of producing Central Asian “national” goods, detailing both the pragmatic and ideological motivations for this policy as it originated in the 1920s and then following its development over subsequent decades in conjunction with shifting ideas about nationality. Discussions surrounding the policy of producing Central Asian-style goods reveal an arena in which cultural difference (within certain limits) came to be regarded as a desirable and defining feature of modern Soviet life, and one that could and should persist indefinitely in the future. Chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth examination of debates about Central Asian material culture and handicrafts among professional artists, ethnographers, and employees of economic institutions, especially in the post-Stalin decades. These debates served as one of the primary battlegrounds in the larger debate about what the content of Central Asian nationality was to become under modern, Soviet conditions. By the Brezhnev era, Soviet artistic professionals had formulated a strong affirmative defense of ethno-cultural specificity in both material culture and daily practice.

Chapter 3 will shift focus to the local-language Central Asian press, examining advice and guidance for Central Asian consumers published in women’s journals between the 1950s and 1980s. These advice articles followed a general Soviet pattern of ideas about appropriate and inappropriate consumption, and especially during the Khrushchev era, efforts to “educate consumer taste,” but were modified to accommodate elements of Central Asian style and the use of traditional goods. Simultaneously, they folded a set of appeals to local values – child-rearing, hospitality, and female modesty – into their vision of the ideal Soviet Central Asian consumer. The mutual entanglement of

state-derived and specifically local discourses will be investigated further in Chapter 4, which will examine how “Soviet” and “Central Asian” rhetorics and ideals were deployed in overlapping ways in discussions of youth consumerism within the Central Asian-language satirical press. By the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, I will argue, Soviet Central Asian satire came to be thoroughly immersed in a matrix of local language, local associations, and local concerns. The incorporation of locally distinctive priorities and values into the satirical press considerably widened the possibilities of public print discourse in Central Asia during the Soviet period. In particular, the antipathy toward consumer culture and appeal to the values of an older generation in post-war official rhetoric seems to have lent legitimacy to Central Asian push-back against cultural “modernization” and Europeanization, which may have otherwise seemed contrary to Soviet ideals.

Finally, Chapter 5 will utilize a combination of oral histories, ethnographies, and literary sources to explore consumer choice and discourses of identification among individual Central Asians. These accounts highlight both the opportunities that consumption provided and the many traps and double-binds that faced Central Asian consumers, especially women. Social pressures and norms were not homogenous throughout the region, but were defined differently, even incompatibly, in different public and private spaces. At the same time, personal accounts of consumer choice suggest the ways in which the discourses of the Soviet state and the Central Asian press discussed in previous chapters became interlaced with individual experience and affect. The gradually widening space for Central Asian ethnic and cultural difference within the bounds of Soviet acceptability did not make questions of ethnicity, authenticity, and belonging less charged, but instead opened them up to wide-ranging social contestation. By the end of the Soviet period, both Europeanizing and traditionalist modes of consumption could be justified in terms of Soviet ethics and aesthetics, but this growing political inclusiveness was met by a flourishing of local disagreements over fundamental values, tensions among

proponents of different regimes of consumption and ways of life, and deep socioeconomic and cultural divides within Central Asian society.

CHAPTER ONE

Mass-Producing “National Forms”: Soviet Policy and the Production of Central Asian National Goods, 1917-1985

By the final decades of Soviet rule, Soviet economic institutions in Central Asia were producing a wide array of locally-specific objects, modeled on traditional items of clothing, décor, and household use, for Central Asian consumers. This included an assortment of items that sought to update Central Asian traditional handicrafts in accordance with modern fashions and tastes, to occasionally kitschy effect: a women’s pantsuit featuring what is described as “Kyrgyz national ornamentation”¹; a low dining table with a lacquered postcard image of Samarkand on its surface;² Turkmen wedding rugs adorned with the image of a Zhiguli automobile.³ But this policy also entailed the truly mass production of a small selection of items that remained more or less traditional in design. By 1972, for example, state enterprises in the Uzbek SSR reported the yearly production of over 1.4 million Uzbek skull caps (Uzb. *do’ppi*, Rus. *tiubeteika*).⁴ By far the most popular and extensively produced variety (numbering 622,000 units in 1972) was the *Chust do’ppi*, which employed an essentially unmodified traditional design, native to the Uzbek town of Chust, with white embroidery in the shape of a stylized pepper or almond on a black background (Figure 1.1). While some objects of pre-revolutionary indigenous material culture all but disappeared over the course of the Soviet period, others were altered, “modernized,” standardized, or, as in the case of the *Chust do’ppi*, simply raised to the level of ubiquity as a result of their mass production and circulation within the Soviet planned economy.

¹ *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 11 (Nov. 1976).

² Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

³ A.A. Khakimov, *Sovremennoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo respublik Srednei Azii: k probleme traditsii i novatorstva* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo “Fan” UzSSR, 1988), 34.

⁴ TsGA RUz F. 2271, Op. 1, d. 160, 25-45.



Figure 1.1. Embroiderers at the Artistic Goods Factory in Chust, Uzbekistan. The women, seated around an Uzbek *so'zana*, showcase their work on the black and white *Chust do'ppi* in a photo for the Soviet Uzbek press. Source: Photo by A. Gubenko, *Saodat* no. 3 (Mar. 1981).

Although sometimes discussed in official sources in a unitary way, the production of “national” goods in Central Asia was never a single clear-cut or self-contained policy. It was not a category consistently utilized in Soviet economic planning, nor was it ever subject to the administration and oversight of a single institution. Instead, it was characterized by a diverse array of official motives and subject to the overlapping, occasionally competing, priorities of Soviet economic policy, artistic policy, and nationalities policy. In the long term, this diversity of official motives seems to have contributed to the policy’s longevity and resilience more than it undermined its unity. At various points, the production of national-style goods was raised within official discussions (to be sure, not always entirely convincingly) as a solution to an astounding array of problems, including the near-total lack of industrial manufacturing in certain parts of Central Asia, the difficulties of transporting manufactured goods from Russia into the region, the limited participation of Central Asian women in the workforce, the underdeveloped aesthetic tastes of Central Asian consumers, the special clothing needs of populations in a hot and dry climate, the tricky question of socialist “content” and national “form” in art, and even, by the 1970s, the homogeneity and soullessness of Khrushchev-era apartments and mass-produced household goods. The broad utility of the concept of national-style goods within Soviet discourse and practice helped this policy remain largely intact from its inception in the Stalin era through the end of the Brezhnev period, in spite of dramatically shifting official attitudes toward nationality, local cultural traditions, and consumption during that time.

The state-sponsored production of Central Asian-style goods – clothing, furniture, dishware, textiles, decorative objects, household implements, and so on – began quite early in Soviet history, followed a pattern applied in every republic of the USSR, and remained in place through the final decades of Soviet rule. While calculations of potential economic gain provided an initial impetus for this approach in the 1920s, over the next several decades it became increasingly clear that the Soviet state was committed to this policy regardless of its profitability, and indeed in spite of its frequent economic

disadvantages. Official decrees never entirely stopped referring to the supposed economic benefits of the production of Central Asian-style goods, but at the same time, poor sales and lack of profitability became increasingly regarded as inadmissible reasons for pulling these goods out of production. By the end of the Stalin era, the dominant driving force behind national goods production had become, instead, the confluence of Soviet artistic theory and nationalities policy that framed Central Asian-style material culture as a unique expression of the creative capacities, aesthetic sensibilities, and centuries-long histories of the Central Asian laboring people. The result was the creation of a set of Soviet policies and institutions dedicated not only to fulfilling local consumer demand for traditional-style objects, but also to collecting samples of such objects for display in museums and foreign exhibitions, transmitting the specialized knowledge of Central Asian master craftsmen to subsequent Soviet generations, and preserving artisanal methods of hand-craftsmanship against the encroachment of mechanized production. In aggregate, these policies and institutions conveyed the message that Central Asian ways of life – stripped, to be sure, of certain ideologically objectionable “feudal” or “religious” elements – were not only permissible as part of contemporary Soviet society but even, to a certain extent, protected and guaranteed by the Soviet government. Within Central Asia itself, as we shall see in the coming chapters, the official legitimation of ethno-cultural distinctiveness in material culture generated far-reaching ripple effects, opening up new horizons of consumer choice and new possibilities for the elaboration of national identities “from below,” in the course of everyday domestic life and social interaction. By the last decades of the Soviet period, the mass production of Central Asian-style goods for Central Asian consumers had come to be regarded as something that was not temporary, not a concession to economic necessity, and not a compromise of socialist values, but characteristic of and proper to the ideals of Soviet socialism.

This chapter will present a chronology of the policy of national goods production over the course of the Soviet period, highlighting in particular three historical moments when centralized,

Moscow-based initiatives called for the production of Central Asian-style goods in Central Asian cooperatives and factories. First, from the uncertain early years of Soviet rule in the region until the end of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (1917-1932), state policies emphasized pragmatic and economic motives. They presented the production of local goods, with local materials, by local laborers as the solution to problems of low state capacity and economic dislocation in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and civil war. Even during these early years, though, many state-employed cultural workers and artistic experts, influenced by the upsurge of intelligentsia interest in Russian peasant handicrafts that had occurred during the late imperial period, were beginning to see in the color and ornamentation of traditional Central Asian objects an inherently democratic, socialist, yet ethnically distinctive form of art, manifesting the creative impulses and aspirations of the Central Asian laboring classes. Soviet decision-making bodies showed only limited interest in this perspective until the years before the onset of the Second World War (approximately 1936-1940), when it intersected with a resurgent official interest in developing the ethno-national cultures of the various peoples of the USSR. In the context of the Stalinist state's increasingly effusive celebrations of ethnic particularism after the mid-1930s, the production of national-style goods could be held up as another demonstration of the USSR's anti-colonial nature and another means of developing ethnic signifiers that were ostensibly proletarian, socialist, and compatible with Soviet rule. Over the course of the next two decades, the production of Central Asian-style goods faced a series of challenges on both economic and ideological grounds, particularly as a result of the wide-ranging reevaluation of Soviet ideals that characterized Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" efforts. But while national goods production might be de-prioritized or sidelined temporarily during these years, it was never rejected on principle. Finally, during the early years of the Brezhnev era (particularly between 1966 and 1975), Moscow issued a series of decrees that decisively reaffirmed the production of national goods unique to each of the republics of the Soviet Union. This final set of policies strengthened and consolidated the institutions responsible for producing Central Asian-style goods,

fueled an effusive rhetoric of national distinctiveness, and expanded the production of certain traditional-style objects to truly mass levels, establishing the conditions that would sustain the policy through the end of the Soviet period in 1991.

“National goods” as a category: Definitions and quantitative scope

Before embarking on this chronological survey, it will be useful to define more precisely what is meant by “national goods” and their place within the Soviet Central Asian economy. Although the concept of a set of consumer goods unique to the Central Asian republics in design, ornament, or function was in official use almost from the first moments of Soviet power in the region, the category of “national goods” never received a technical definition within state policy. By the 1930s, the term most widely used to refer to Central Asian-style goods, not only among art historians and enthusiasts but also among policy-makers and economic planners in the Soviet Union, was “folk artistic crafts” (Russ. *narodnye khudozhestvennye promysly*), a category which derived from the pre-revolutionary period and the late imperial revival of interest in Russian handicrafts produced predominantly by rural artisans. But in spite of a considerable amount of overlap, this term was never exactly congruent with the category of Central Asian-style goods. On the one hand, “folk artistic crafts” excluded objects of traditional Central Asian design that were predominantly produced in state factories rather than specialized “artistic” workshops, which included locally specific varieties furniture, metal dishware, and clothing. On the other hand, it included the traditional handicrafts of “European” populations living in the region, such as Russian and Ukrainian lacework and cross-stitch. To give one example, a 1969 Kyrgyz Council of Ministers decree ordering the production of “items of folk artistic crafts” specified goods that included not only Central Asian-style carpets, Kyrgyz textile crafts like *shyrdaks* and *tush-kiyiz*, men’s and women’s national costumes, and “goods made from velvet and plush cloth with a national inclination [*s natsional’nym uklonom*],” but also a variety of hand-crafted items that were not traditional to Central

Asia: hand-knitted scarves and sweaters, ceramic emblems of the republic, papier-mâché knick-knacks, decorative vases and boxes, and so on.⁵ Because Soviet economic planning often tracked the production of “folk artistic crafts” only as an aggregate category, with no breakdown by the specific assortment of goods, it can be quite difficult to trace the category of national goods, particularly quantitative data on their production, through the Soviet documentation.

This is not to say, however, that the ethno-cultural specificity of these goods was not a topic of interest among Soviet officials and policy-makers. Despite the lack of a clear institutional home or line-item within the planned economy, the concept of goods that were traditional to or culturally unique to Central Asia cropped up frequently in official decrees, institutional reports, and publicity in the Soviet press. The terminology in these discussions could vary: various consumer goods might be modified with the adjectives “national” (*natsional’nyi*), “Kyrgyz,” “Uzbek,” or less frequently, “asiatic” or “eastern”; traditional objects might be discussed using their local-language names, without direct Russian equivalent (e.g. the Uzbek low table, *xontaxta*, or the Kyrgyz appliqued felt mat, *shyrdak*); finally, especially in later decades, objects that were in themselves not traditional to the region, such as glass vases, synthetic fabrics, or television mats, might be described as being decorated with “national ornamentation” (Figure 1.2). Even with this varied, informal, and imprecise collection of terms, however, there seems to have been an understanding that they all belonged to the same generally comprehensible category of things, which I am referring to collectively as “national goods.”

From pre-revolutionary material culture to Soviet-era “national goods.” Like most of what came to be canonized as “national” for Central Asian peoples during the Soviet period, objects belonging to the category of national goods were neither invented out of whole cloth by the Soviet state nor an unmediated reflection of Central Asia’s pre-revolutionary material culture. Over the course of the Soviet

⁵ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 30, 22-24. In this case and others where Russian-language sources refer to goods using terms from Central Asian languages, I have adjusted spellings for the sake of consistency (e.g., *shyrdak* rather than *shirdak*).



Figure 1.2. Women's pantsuit adorned with "Kyrgyz national ornamentation" (*kyrgyzdyn uluttuk oiumu*). Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 11 (Nov. 1976).

period, Central Asian traditional-style objects narrowed in their variety, grew more homogenized and standardized at the republic level, and shifted toward an emphasis on a relatively small collection of items (especially articles of clothing and home décor) that became the ubiquitous signifiers of the “national.” But this process only rarely involved the deliberate “invention” or manipulation of Central Asian national goods by the Soviet state. Rather, the selection of objects that came to be manufactured as Central Asian “national goods” by the post-war period emerged out of a combination of the intellectual frameworks and interests of Stalin-era and post-Stalin academics, the capabilities and limitations of the Soviet economy, and the aesthetic demands of Soviet policy-makers, foreign markets, and Central Asian consumers alike. Neither waging an uncompromising war on Central Asian material culture nor cynically concocting a state-approved version of it, Soviet policy was often driven by a surprisingly lenient interpretation of what was compatible with socialist modernity, and in some cases even by an impulse toward the preservation of local material cultures in the face of other wide-ranging efforts at cultural transformation.

To be sure, there were some items of pre-revolutionary Central Asian material culture that were excluded from consideration as legitimate components of “national culture,” and even more so from mass production in Soviet factories, due to their unacceptability from an ideological perspective. As a Soviet-authored history of folk crafts production puts it, after the revolution, “some traditional types of goods were seen as alien to the new Soviet life, since they reflected obsolete social attitudes, rites, and superstitions.”⁶ Most obviously, the full-body veil and horsehair face-covering (*paranji* and *chachvon*) worn by some Uzbek women became sharply stigmatized after 1927, decried within party rhetoric as a tool of the Islamic oppression of women, and fell out of public use over the subsequent decades as a

⁶ V.M. Vasilenko, et al., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: “Iskusstvo,” 1984), 164.

consequence of consistent state pressure.⁷ A similar, if less high-profile, stigma was attached to a handful of other ideologically undesirable objects: men’s turbans (which by the 1950s had become signifiers of religious fanaticism and superstition in the satirical press) and various kinds of objects used in the capacity of talismans or wards, on the one hand, which were categorized as religious or superstitious within the Soviet worldview; and items “manufactured for the needs of the feudal aristocracy,” on the other, including, according to a 1954 Soviet study, “horsecloths, large carpets, [and] trimmings for the trousers of wealthy hunters.”⁸ But the number of traditional Central Asian objects specifically targeted for extinction in this way was strikingly small. In particular, as we will see below, the Soviet state eventually opted not to condemn but instead to appropriate many items that had formerly been the exclusive province of the wealthy classes – gold jewelry, richly embroidered wall-hangings, carved wooden furniture, expensive silks – claiming that under socialism, such luxuries would for the first time become available to the laboring masses.

Perhaps even more transformative than specific state prohibitions, though, were the effects of the socioeconomic and cultural dislocations caused by the Soviet policies of the 1920s and 1930s. The impact of sedentarization among the nomadic population of Kyrgyzstan provides an especially poignant example. “After the Great October socialist revolution,” a 1968 Soviet text on Kyrgyz handicrafts explains, “with the transition to a settled way of life and development of residences of a permanent type among the Kyrgyz, the necessity of manufacturing objects connected with migration and the internal and external decoration of the yurt disappeared.”⁹ Entire trades were lost in the aftermath of this “transition” (which was by no means as natural and bloodless as that term makes it sound),

⁷ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁸ *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 135-136.

⁹ *Trudy Kirgizskoi arkhologo-etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii t. 5: Narodnoe dekorativnoe-prikladnoe iskusstvo Kirgizov*, ed. S.V. Ivanov and K.I. Antipina (Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1968), 30.

including the crafting of leather flasks and metal ornaments for decorating harnesses. Again, however, the consequences of the Soviet state's violent campaign of de-nomadization, undeniable though they were, were counterweighted by an unexpectedly powerful instinct among many officials and artistic professionals toward cultural preservation. The same author, for instance, felt obliged to add:

It does not follow from this that the *ornamentation* connected with these objects must also unavoidably disappear as outmoded and unnecessary. On the contrary, the enormous artistic heritage of the people, the ornamental richness they have produced over the course of centuries, the amazing color and technical achievement, may find the very broadest application in socialist Kyrgyzstan, in the daily life of both the urban and rural population of the republic.¹⁰

In this frequently repeated view, Soviet institutions could and should preserve and reproduce the unique ornamental decoration characteristic of traditional Kyrgyz objects, even if the many of the objects themselves had “lost their relevance” and begun to disappear. By the 1970s, the Kyrgyz yurt and its associated crafts and décor had been firmly accepted as part of Kyrgyzstan's state-approved national heritage, as evidenced by a string of articles in the Kyrgyz-language women's journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* praising the interior and exterior adornment of the traditional yurt and even advising contemporary women on how to integrate its associated objects and aesthetic elements into modern Soviet homes.¹¹

A handful of more mundane forces within Soviet policy-making and economic planning also helped to shape, often in unintended ways, the collection of objects that would become canonically regarded as “national goods” within each Central Asian republic over the course of the Soviet period. Problems with the allocation of raw materials and the intensive labor required for traditional methods of hand-craftsmanship led to a constriction (though not a disappearance) of Central Asian crafts like

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹ A. Akmatallyev, “Boz üydün zhygachchylgy,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 8 (Aug. 1978): 23; Sakish Arpachieva, “Boz üydü tigüü,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1978): 23; S. Kadyraliev, “Boz üydün ichki zhasalgasy,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 10 (Oct. 1978): 23.

wood and alabaster carving, metal casting, and woodblock printing on fabrics.¹² By the same token, truly mass production within Soviet factories tended to favor types of Central Asian goods that were inherently quite simple in shape and that required little in the way of specialized tools or hand labor, like the simple, loose-fitting profile of the “Uzbek national dress” and the uncomplicated bowl-like form of the Central Asian teacup (*piyola*). The introduction of mechanized production methods, while never completely crowding out artisanal hand production, also served to alter the face of Central Asian material culture. A 1970 proposal to introduce a kind of assembly-line method for the embroidery of traditional Uzbek wall tapestries (Uzb. *soʻzana*), in which each embroiderer would work with one color of thread in the pattern before passing it to the next, would have effectively eliminated the individual authorship that the embroiderer possessed when she was responsible for both the design and the execution of a single object.¹³ Textile factories in the early 1950s, seeking ways to cheaply increase their output, experimented with recreating the effect produced by the so-called *abr* method of Uzbek silk-weaving, in which multi-colored silk threads were woven together to produce a shimmering, wave-like design, by machine-printing patterns “on the basis of *abr* folk designs” onto lower-cost fabrics like cotton or satin.¹⁴ The results of these experiments were evidently mixed; as a Soviet expert on Uzbek textiles wrote in 1954, “The samples produced by factories have so far not managed to achieve that unique effect, that indistinctness and exceptional softness of the design’s contours” that could be achieved by the *abr* weaving method.¹⁵ A similar but evidently more successful case of technological innovation was the method of “photo-film printing” (*fotofilʼmpechatʼ*) that was used to approximate the

¹² For complaints to this effect from official and professional artistic circles dating from various moments in the post-war period, see TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 441, 2; M. Skorovarova, “Skuchaiut ruki masterov,” *Pravda Vostoka*, 11 Apr. 1967; TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 571, 12.

¹³ TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 405, 169.

¹⁴ O.A. Sukhareva, “Tkani,” *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetского Uzbekistana: tekstilʼ*, ed. V.A. Nilʼsen (Tashkent: Izdatelʼstvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 41-42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

detailed embroidery on Uzbek skull caps. This method first became widespread in the 1960s, and by 1968 Uzbekistan's Ministry of Local Industry was reporting 218,500 skull caps produced through the photo-film printing method, alongside 479,300 produced by machine embroidery and 377,000 by hand embroidery.¹⁶ Significantly, even as production methods and the resulting products themselves grew further and further estranged from pre-revolutionary traditions, all of these objects were comfortably encompassed within the category of Central Asian "national goods" within Soviet thinking and discourse.

A final factor accounting for the gulf between Central Asian material cultures as they existed in the pre-revolutionary period and Central Asian "national goods" as they emerged during the Soviet era is the role of what we might call invented traditions. These follow the general pattern defined by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, emerging out of the dialogue between "the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant," but without the implications of top-down state manipulation and deliberate pursuit of political expediency that are often assumed in the Soviet case.¹⁷ First of all, the "invented" additions to the canon of Central Asian national goods accentuated as much as they bridged the gulf between Russian or European and Central Asian cultures. In some cases they served to make Central Asian material cultures more compatible with Soviet ideals, but at least as often they simply functioned as a new set of markers with which Central Asians could assert their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Second, these "invented" national goods were not created in a single stroke, nor were they conjured up by Moscow-based Soviet authorities. They instead emerged from a complicated process that included the categorizing and cataloguing activities of Soviet professionals and the

¹⁶ TsGA RUz F. 2771, Op. 1, d. 2, 31-36.

¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-2. Hobsbawm and Ranger, in fact, include in their definition of "invented tradition" not only traditions that are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted" through a process of deliberate manipulation and those that arise "in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period."

stereotyping effect of Soviet economic planning, but also ground-level shifts in local practice that occurred shortly prior to and during the Soviet era.

Two examples will help illustrate how goods and practices that were not widespread in the pre-revolutionary period could come to be canonized as “national” not only in official rhetoric, but in popular practice as well. The now-characteristic Uzbek skull cap (*do’ppi*) became an obligatory part of “Uzbek national costume” only after it “replaced all earlier existing types of men’s and women’s embroidered headwear,” in the words of a 1972 Soviet study by Uzbek design expert D.A. Fakhretdinova.¹⁸ In earlier periods, the *do’ppi* had typically been worn by men underneath a turban, and by women not at all; the proliferation of richly embroidered *do’ppis* with differing designs for men and young women was a product of the early Soviet period, when both the turban and the *paranji* veil were pushed out of the public sphere and the practice of *do’ppi*-wearing began to take their place as a signifier of cultural belonging that was less overtly Islamic and more palatable in the Soviet public sphere. Simultaneously, regionally-specific variants of the *do’ppi* headwear, especially those from the cities of Chust, Marg’ilon, and Shahrisabz, were losing their exclusively local character and growing increasingly popular throughout the Uzbek republic.¹⁹ The Chust *do’ppi*, in particular, became tantamount to the canonically “Uzbek” piece of male headwear. While the reasons for this are not entirely clear, Fakhretdinova theorizes that due to its muted color scheme and “classical maturity and restraint,” the Chust *do’ppi* was able to “harmonize now with modern clothing – a suit or an overcoat of European cut,” adhering to the staid, businesslike standards of European-style male dress better than more colorful or ornately decorated alternatives.²⁰ Nevertheless, it continued to serve as a marker of ethnic distinctiveness, and by the late Soviet period, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, both consumers

¹⁸ D.A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekoratивно-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Iz-vo literatury i iskusstva im. Gafura Guliyama, 1972), 62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

and press satirists might use it to indicate an identity and set of values that was not only non-Russian, but even contrasted with the “Europeanized” ways of life of urban Central Asians.

A second “invented” addition to the Uzbek national costume that became practically inescapable during the second half of the Soviet period is what is commonly referred to as the “Uzbek national dress” (known in Uzbek as the *ko’krak burma ko’ylak*, dress with pleats along the bust line). Even the general contours of the cut of the *ko’krak burma* appear to have arrived relatively late in the pre-revolutionary period; one Soviet source claims that it “was introduced to the cities of Uzbekistan in the 1880s by Kazan Tatars,”²¹ while another says it “appeared for the first time in Tashkent at the beginning of this century, but in the rural regions of Tashkent oblast began to spread only in the 1920s.”²² The form of the dress underwent extensive modification in the course of the subsequent decades, becoming shorter and somewhat less spacious and acquiring a turned-down collar and shortened sleeves. By the 1970s, the hemline most commonly fell at or just below the knee, which supposedly rendered its shape more modern and suitable for women’s participation in labor, distancing it from the “unbelievably opulent and cumbersome clothing characteristic of the [pre-revolutionary] aristocracy.”²³ At the same time, however, a concession to local expectations of feminine modesty was preserved in the loose, flowing shape of the dress, which distinguished it from European-style dresses with more body-hugging silhouettes and cinched waists (Figure 1.3). Like the *do’ppi*, the so-called “Uzbek national dress” constituted a quintessentially modern invention that served within Central Asian society as a signifier for ethnic distinctiveness and even, in some cases, for traditionalist values. When I refer to certain Soviet-produced goods as “traditional-style,” “Central Asian-style,” or “national,” then,

²¹ G.P. Vasil’eva, “Nekotorye tendentsii razvitiia sovremennykh natsional’nykh traditsii v material’noi kul’ture narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 3 (1979): 21, footnote.

²² A.N. Zhilina, “Sovremennaia material’naia kul’tura sel’skogo naseleniia Tashkentskoi oblasti Uzbeksoi SSR,” in *Material’naia kul’tura narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana*, ed. N.A. Kisliakov and M.G. Vorob’eva (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1966), 135.

²³ Fakhretdinova 53.



Figure 1.3. 1969 advertisement for “new styles” of Uzbek national dress. The models include both cinched-waist European-style dresses and the loose-hanging *ko’krak burma ko’ylak*, modified with shortened sleeves and a knee-length hem. A number of the dresses are also shown with the wave-like patterns of Uzbek *atlas* silk cloth. Source: “Yangi liboslar,” *Saodat* no. 5 (May 1969): 31.

the intention is not to assert any particular continuity with the pre-revolutionary past, which is at times tenuous at best, but rather to emphasize the visible difference from the standard, Russian or European norm of Soviet modernity.

The quantitative scope of national goods production. Neither the Soviet state as a whole nor the Central Asian republics individually seem to have ever systematically and comprehensively tracked the quantitative production of Uzbek and Kyrgyz “national goods.” Even as numerous policy decrees over the course of the seventy-year Soviet period noted the deficit of “goods of the national assortment” in the Central Asian republics and demanded attention to this matter, record-keeping and assessments of plan fulfillment often remained locked into aggregate categories with no distinction between national and non-national varieties of goods: how many women’s dresses, how many tons of

wooden furniture, how many thousands of rubles of embroidered textiles.²⁴ In fact, this persistent failure to track production or sales “by assortment” with any level of precision led to considerable consternation among Soviet economic analysts when they began to attempt to systematically study consumer demand after 1966. A report from Kyrgyzstan’s Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand explained the inherent difficulty of offering projections of the future demand for sewn goods: “The most complex part of the prediction is determining the assortment structure of the demand for clothing. The complexity lies in the fact that *information about the sale of sewn goods by assortment is completely lacking in the period under analysis (1960-1971).*”²⁵ For a period of more than a decade, in other words, Soviet institutions themselves lacked comprehensive data about the quantities of particular items of clothing – wool overcoats in particular styles, pants of different material and cut, national dresses – that had been sold in the republic. If this was true for the sewn goods industry, it was doubly so for the category of “artistic goods” to which Central Asian national goods were often assigned, and which was often tracked with nothing more than a single lump-sum figure indicating ruble value. Even in Russia, a 1972 report on artistic goods production complained, institutions were forced to rely

²⁴ The production indicators utilized within Soviet Central Asian economic documentation are inconsistent both over time and among different institutions. In some cases, the category of national goods, or an assortment breakdown that included individual national items, might appear at the factory level but fall out as production figures were aggregated by higher-standing institutions. In other cases, some factories might provide such a breakdown, while others under the same institutional umbrella (e.g. the Ministry of Light Industry) would offer clothing production figures differentiated solely by type of material (cotton, wool, silk, etc.). As a result, some of the assortment categories present in the documentation – “women’s silk dresses,” “wool rugs,” “blankets,” “artistic goods” – might easily, and in a few cases clearly did, include both national and non-national production. The existence of national goods production with no archival paper trail is especially likely in cases where the “national” quality of an item depended on a relatively simple and easily reproducible form rather than on elaborate ornamentation that would have been expensive to produce and require specialized tools and skilled labor. A satirical poem in a 1951 issue of the Uzbek-language journal *Mushtum*, for example, alleged that local artels favored the production of the national-style women’s dress (*ko’krak burma ko’ylak*) even in the absence of specific quotas for it, simply because the loose, flowing, uncomplicated cut of the dress made it easier and quicker to sew than a more form-fitting, tailored European-style dress: “Although the people don’t wear it, it’s easy to sew / This ‘new fashion’ from a hundred years ago.” See Sobir Abdulla, “Katta shahar ikir-chikirlari,” *Mushtum* no. 4 (Dec. 1951): 4.

²⁵ Emphasis added. TsGA KR F. 1576, Op. 1N, d. 19, 89.

on “reports containing only the most general, undifferentiated indicators, taking into account neither the concrete assortment of goods nor the artistic and stylistic specificities of the products sold.”²⁶

But while it is difficult to determine the quantitative scope of national goods production in Soviet Central Asia with any degree of precision, examining even a few of the scattered data points that are available will help give an impressionistic sense of its scale. To summarize briefly, national goods production seems to have constituted a significant but not majority share of state consumer goods production in the Central Asian republics, with substantially greater production in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan. At a few moments, typically periods when national goods production came under direct scrutiny from higher-standing organizations, truly mass production becomes briefly visible in archival sources. In the first quarter of 1934, for instance, the proportion of goods of the “national assortment” in each of Uzbekistan’s five major sewing factories ranged from 30.3% to 92.5% of total actual production, amounting to 53.2% national-style production across all five factories.²⁷ In absolute numerical terms, this included a quarterly production of 13,628 men’s wool “national robes,” 94,672 pairs of men’s “national pants,” and 85,441 women’s “national dresses.”²⁸ These proportions may be unusually high, however. In 1948, the yearly production plan for the Uzbek Ministry of Light Industry included 190,000 Uzbek cotton dresses, as compared to 300,000 European cotton dresses – about 39% “national” production within the category of cotton dresses.²⁹ The situation was even more constrained in Kyrgyzstan where, until the end of the 1950s, most production of national goods seems to have taken place among cooperativized artisanal producers rather than in state factories. This meant both that clear numerical data is much thinner and that actual production quantities were much lower, likely

²⁶ GARF F. A-643, Op. 2, d. 99, 4.

²⁷ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 18, d. 48, 122-123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁹ TsGa RUz F. 837, Op. 33, d. 6057, 62-64.

numbering in the thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands.³⁰ After the Brezhnev-era revitalization of “folk crafts” production, discussed in further detail below, records from the newly formed Uzbek Association of Folk Artistic Crafts offer perhaps the most indisputable evidence of mass Soviet production of a whole array of traditional-style items, including over a million *do’ppi*s yearly (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. Yearly production of selected Central Asian-style consumer goods for 1972 within Uzbekistan’s Main Administration of Folk Artistic Crafts. Source: TsGA RUz F. 2771, Op. 1, d. 160, 25-45.

Type	Quantity
<i>Do’ppi</i> , total	1442.6 thousand
---- <i>Do’ppi</i> , hand-embroidered	452.7 thousand
---- <i>Do’ppi</i> , machine-embroidered	693.4 thousand
---- <i>Do’ppi</i> , photo-film printing method	296.5 thousand
<i>So’zana</i> (including, <i>atlas</i> , cotton, velvet, etc.)	126.6 thousand
<i>Chorsi</i> [embroidered men’s waistband]	345 thousand
<i>Kosa</i> [Central Asian-style bowl]	751,773
<i>Lagan</i> [Central Asian-style serving platter]	107,818
<i>Piyola</i>	67,500

³⁰ Unfortunately, during the years of the Producers’ Cooperative in Kyrgyzstan, production figures tended to be given solely in ruble values and with little differentiation by assortment. In 1958, for example, the Producers’ Cooperative reported a yearly production of 3473.6 thousand rubles in the category “artistic stitching and embroidery,” which very likely included national-style *shyrdaks* and *tush-kiyiz*. After the dissolution of the Cooperative, the record-keeping improves somewhat, though comprehensive data remains lacking. A 1968 report on the production of Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Local Industry cited yearly production of 93,500 pairs of “national women’s boots” and 22,500 pairs of “women’s national *ichigi*.” TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 4, d. 221, 98-103; TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 64, 136-142. Interestingly, this imbalance in production between the two republics could occasionally lead to a cross-border flow of so-called national goods. Representatives of the Kyrgyz Consumers’ Union from Osh oblast complained in 1967 of “a leakage [*utechka*] of money from our oblast to other [Uzbek] oblasts – Andijan and Namangan” due to the local deficit of (otherwise unspecified) national-style furniture, with one Kyrgyz official noting that “the population of our raion is forced to buy national goods in Uzbekistan... totaling a sum of up to 1 million rubles.” See TsGA KR F. 573, Op. 6, d. 558, 54.

Of course, production figures only tell part of the story. It is important to note that not all of the national goods available to Central Asian consumers would have been produced outright by the Soviet planned economy;³¹ likewise, the non-national (“European-style”) consumer goods available in Central Asia were not exclusively produced in the republics themselves, but often imported from abroad or hauled in from other Soviet regions. Here, a handful of late-Soviet statistical studies attempting to measure actual consumer ownership of particular items can provide some perspective. By the 1970s, Uzbek and Kyrgyz national goods appear to divide into two broad categories in terms of the scale of their consumption and use among residents of the region. On one end of the spectrum, there was a selection of goods that were nominally produced by state institutions and legitimated in state rhetoric while being available to Central Asian consumers only in limited quantities. This included items like heavily ornamented carved wooden furniture, stamped metal items, and woodblock-printed fabrics, which remained prohibitively expensive and labor-intensive to produce and existed more as pricey decorative artworks than as objects of everyday use. On the other end of the spectrum were national-style goods that were produced and consumed en masse, to the point that they became genuinely ubiquitous in the daily life of residents of the region. This latter group included items like the Uzbek national dress (*ko’krak burma ko’ylak*), traditional headwear (the *kalpak* in Kyrgyzstan and the *do’ppi* in Uzbekistan), and certain items of ceramic dishware, which were all but universal in their availability. According to a 1974 survey of households in Uzbekistan conducted by the republic’s Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand, ownership of the Central Asian ceramic tea-drinking bowl (Uzb. *piyola*, Kyrg. *piyala*) – a culturally important item both within everyday life and for the reception of large

³¹ Other possible sources included the inheritance of goods that had been produced in the pre-revolutionary period; home-production of certain items (especially embroidery, felt working, and clothing, which itself often utilized factory-produced cloth); and custom orders of items from state-run tailoring services (*indposhiv*) or state-employed artisans. In some cases, these alternative channels for obtaining goods could lead to the continued circulation of traditional-style items that were deliberately excluded from production in Soviet industries because they were stigmatized in some way – the *paranji* and the traditional-style Uzbek cradle (*beshtik*), for instance. Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview, 12 May 2014; Ziyoda Usmanova [pseudonym], personal interview, 05 May 2014. For discussion of the official stigmatization of the *beshtik*, see Chapter 3.

numbers of guests at major life events such as wedding feasts – stood at 2278 per 100 families (an average of nearly 23 such bowls for each family surveyed),³² while an analogous 1977 survey in the Kyrgyz SSR found ownership at 1326 per 100 families (roughly 13 per family on average).³³ Similarly, the “Uzbek national dress,” with its characteristic loose-fitting silhouette, became one of the most popular items of women’s clothing in the republic, demonstrated impressionistically by its ubiquity in photographs and personal accounts from the post-war decades; it evidently even crossed republican borders, becoming an item of “national” dress in Kyrgyzstan as well (Figure 1.5).³⁴ While certain items of Kyrgyz “traditional” women’s costume, according to a 1972 survey, were owned by niche groups within the population (e.g. 23.4 traditional vests, Kyrg. *chypama*, per 100 women surveyed), the “national dress” (otherwise unspecified in the survey) was more nearly universal (191.2 per 100 women surveyed).³⁵ On the whole, then, the Soviet policy of mass-producing and selling Central Asian-style goods alongside European-style ones meant that national goods were neither completely crowded out by the arrival of “modern” objects and fashions, nor consumed to their exclusion. They constituted, instead, an additional dimension of consumer choice in the region, eventually growing into a new medium for the differentiation of the population along both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic lines.

³² TsGA RUz F. 2750, Op. 1N, d. 19, 16-20. As reports of the Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand point out, a quirk of Central Asian statistics on consumer goods ownership, which were typically measured per 100 families, was the unusually large size of families in the region compared to the USSR as a whole. In 1974, at the time of the above-mentioned survey, for example, the average Uzbek family size was 5.3 people, as compared to 3.2 for the USSR in total. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³³ TsGA KR, F. 1576, Op. 1N, d. 58, 32-33.

³⁴ According to a 1979 ethnography by G.P. Vasil’eva, both the Uzbek national dress and the Chust do’ppi had “begun to be eagerly worn by Karakalpaks and in other republics neighboring Uzbekistan.” G.P. Vasil’eva, “Nekotorye tendentsii razvitiia sovremennykh natsional’nykh traditsii v material’noi kul’ture narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 3 (1979): 21.

³⁵ TsGA KR, F. 1576, Op. 1N, d. 19, 103.



Figure 1.5. Photographs of the “Uzbek national dress” worn by Uzbek and Kyrgyz women.

Above: A 1983 Uzbek wedding, with many of the female guests wearing the Uzbek national dress made from *atlas* silk. Under her white dress and veil, the bride is wearing traditional-style gold-stitched *lozim* and slippers. Source: Shoira Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.

Below: A family photograph dating from 1968-69, showing a Kyrgyz woman wearing an “Uzbek national dress.” Oral history respondent Salamat Beshimova said that this fashion was common among rural Kyrgyz women. Source: Salamat Beshimova [pseudonym], personal interview, 11 Aug. 2014.

Early economic motives: Central Asian crafts as domestic stimulus and foreign export, 1917-1932

In their earliest form, following the consolidation of Soviet power in Central Asia in the early 1920s, Soviet policies promoting the development of traditional handicrafts were rooted primarily in short-term economic concerns: economic recovery following the devastation of civil war, meeting the basic material needs of the population and of key state industries, and utilizing locally available resources to the greatest extent possible. The production of Central Asian-style goods was initially less a goal of Soviet policy in itself than a byproduct of efforts to make most efficient use of the labor, transport, and raw materials available locally within the region.³⁶ In some cases, the rationale for policies enabling national goods production boiled down to straightforward economic exploitation, with the paramount state interests being resource extraction and export. One 1928 report by the Central Asian Economic Council (Sredazekoso) baldly affirmed the semi-colonial position of the region within the all-union economy and proposed that handicraft production would eliminate the need to divert scarce manufactures to Central Asian laborers. "In the economic system of the Union, Central Asia is considered a raw materials-producing region," the report stated. "From this perspective, artisanal industry, as the sector supplying the raw materials-producing economy with manufactured goods, has an especially great significance."³⁷ Until after the end of the First Five-Year Plan, the ideological reasons the state might want to support the production of Central Asian goods were barely discussed, much less systematically theorized. Nevertheless, even in this earliest period, a matter-of-fact and generally accommodating attitude toward ethnic differences in material culture is already visible, alongside the beginnings of advocacy for the more humanitarian, aesthetic, and idealistic aims that would eventually come to dominate discussions of the production of national goods in the post-war period.

³⁶ On the principle of "utilization" of private industry, see Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 25, 208-209.

³⁷ TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, d. 1016, 44.

Across the territories under Bolshevik control, the advent of the New Economic Policy in 1921 created a tense but legalized space for small independent artisanal industries, alongside efforts to integrate them into producers' cooperatives under Soviet auspices. A 1925 resolution of the RKP(b) explained, "Artisanal industry, crafts, and trades had and will continue for a long time to have an extremely great significance in the general economy of the USSR... [Artisanal industry] is a means of utilizing the excess work force of the village and, in some regions, is the main source of peasant incomes."³⁸ The resolution thus called for a variety of measures intended to increase the incomes of cooperativized artisans and improve their conditions of work, but also measures to promote closer ties between cooperatives and the state, with state planning providing supplies for artisanal industries and cooperatives fulfilling orders for goods from state institutions. Partially as a result of such policies, pre-revolutionary handicraftsmen – silk-weavers, embroiderers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpet-makers, and so on – continued to produce many of the same goods they had before the revolution in small workshops through the late 1920s. Later, with the repeal of the NEP and beginning of the push for collectivization in 1928, some Central Asian artisans, like their counterparts elsewhere in the Soviet Union, were "dekulakized," arrested, and sent into exile, their confiscated property and tools becoming the material basis for the establishment of state-monitored production cooperatives and artels.³⁹ Most small-scale producers, however, were gradually incorporated into these cooperatives through a combination of propaganda, economic pressure, and tax incentives. Gradual integration into state-affiliated artels and cooperatives brought Central Asian artisans under the umbrella of Soviet economic planning and made

³⁸ "O promyslovoi kooperatsii," *Sbornik postanovlenii o promyslovoi kooperatsii i kustarnoi promyshlennosti*, ed. A.S. Vashkov (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Sovnarkoma UzSSR, 1936), 13.

³⁹ V.M. Vasilenko, et al., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1984), 170.

them subject to production quotas and pressures from above through the mediation of the producers' cooperative.⁴⁰

The need for the early Soviet state to make use of the labor of local artisans was perceived to be especially great in Central Asia, where, "given the uniqueness of their agricultural implements and the objects of their everyday use," the goods produced by artisanal industry "serv[ed] the most diverse aspects of labor and daily life of the local population."⁴¹ One 1928 report estimated that "in view of the weak development in the [Uzbek] republic of factory industry, artisans serve the indigenous population on average in 80% of their products"; a more carefully documented report from the same year estimated that artisanal industry accounted for 33.4% of manufactured goods sold on the Central Asian market.⁴² Regardless of the precise numbers, though, Soviet officials agreed that the needs of local consumers for basic goods like cloth and clothing, dishware, household items, and so on, could not be satisfied by large-scale factory production either within the Central Asian region or via transport from Russia. In part, this was simply a question of the inability to fulfill the quantitative production needs of local consumers, but intriguingly, the cultural specificity of Central Asian consumer goods was also cited as a factor: "The specific conditions of Uzbekistan, where it is necessary to satisfy the tastes and needs of both the European and indigenous population, can in no way be fully accounted for by enterprises of the sewing industry of the central regions of the USSR."⁴³ In Kyrgyzstan, where many population centers were nestled deep within the country's mountainous regions, with limited access by railroad or, often, roads of any kind, state support for local artisanal producers was considered to be a pragmatic solution

⁴⁰ For a history of all-union policies toward small-scale artisanal production over the course of the Stalin period, see Julie Hessler, "A Postwar Perestroika? Toward a History of Private Enterprise in the USSR," *Slavic Review* 57/3 (Autumn 1998): 516-542.

⁴¹ "Postanovlenie plenuma Sredazbiuro TsK VKP(b) po dokladu o promyshlennosti v respublikakh Srednei Azii," 2-4 Mar. 1926, *KPSS i Sovetskoe Pravitel'stvo ob Uzbekistane: sbornik dokumentov (1925-1970)* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo "Uzbekistan," 1972), 327.

⁴² TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 5, d. 651, 21; TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, d. 1016, 44.

⁴³ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 2, d. 422, 21.

to the limitations of long-distance transport in the early period of Soviet rule. But again, the compiler of a 1928 report felt obliged to add, “Consumer goods [in the country] carry a sharply expressed national character [*rezko vyrazhennyi natsional'nyi kharakter*] and cannot be manufactured and hauled in from the outside.”⁴⁴ In early policy discussions like these, the distinctiveness of the material culture of the Central Asian population, the population’s “tastes and needs” and the “national character” of its consumer goods, tended to be discussed matter-of-factly, with surprisingly little comment on the relationship to the Soviet state’s nationalities policy, modernizing ideal, or theories of the evolutionary development of cultures. The approach could be described as cultural accommodation by default, fueled in equal parts by perceived economic necessity and by the implicit legitimation of ethno-cultural difference found in the state’s avowed anti-colonial nationalities policy.

The principle of maximally utilizing all available economic resources in the service of the NEP-era economic recovery and, after 1928, Stalin’s industrialization drive, called for the utilization not only of commercial artisanal production of traditional-style goods, most developed in the urban areas of Uzbekistan, but also attempts to support and develop home-based handicraft production, on which much of the rural population relied for cloth, clothing, and a variety of household items and implements of labor. In the case of commercialized production, a December 1922 report addressed to Leon Trotskii argued that the Bukharan Soviet Republic (at that time administratively separate from the rest of present-day Uzbekistan) could serve within the broader economy of the Soviet Union both as a source of artisanal products, primarily silks and embroidered textiles, and as an importer of the products of Russian artisans, including metal goods, jewelry, and dyes.⁴⁵ In the case of home production, a 1928 report by the Central Asian Economic Council recommended continued state support for home-based producers of wool cloth in Kyrgyzstan, with such producers “serving the needs of their own *aul* [nomadic

⁴⁴ TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, 231. This same document is available in RGASPI, F. 62, Op. 2, d. 864.

⁴⁵ RGAE F. 4372, Op. 9, d. 48, 1-2.

community], clan, or village.” The report noted, however, that in Kyrgyzstan the primary state economic interest lay in “reducing the use by certain [artisanal] trades of types of raw materials which are in deficit at present,” including leather, a vital item in traditional Kyrgyz craftsmanship.⁴⁶ At this early stage, then, state support for artisanal trades was highly conditional and tied to discrete economic goals; it was important to serve the basic needs of local consumers, but not as important as ensuring artisanal producers did not compete with state industry for scarce and strategically significant raw materials.

If the overwhelming preoccupation was with economic rather than aesthetic or cultural aims during this period, this is not to say that the “pragmatic” policies of the 1920s were uncolored by ideological concerns. Efforts to cooperativize artisans were, state officials argued, not only economically but also politically expedient, especially in regions like Central Asia where Soviet institutions were weak, because they would attract “proletarian elements” to Soviet institutions and facilitate the process of “estranging all native exploiter elements from influence on the masses.”⁴⁷ Simultaneously, they said, in “national regions” (*natsraiony*) like Central Asia, the transition from individual to cooperativized production would serve as a step forward in the evolutionary economic development envisioned by Marxist theory, hastening “the transition of the native laboring masses from backward economic forms to higher ones.”⁴⁸ Finally, because many Central Asian handicrafts – carpets, embroideries, felt mats, and so on – were traditionally produced by women, the cooperativization of artisans would provide a unique means of integrating the labor of Central Asian women into the Soviet economy, as well as, it was hoped, serving the political functions of promoting women’s activism and financial independence. “Several tens of thousands of women are employed in artisanal trades,” concluded a 1928 study, “and economic expediency aside, the organization of women’s trades into producers’ cooperatives is one of

⁴⁶ TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, d. 1016, 54.

⁴⁷ “Kooperirovanie kustarei vostoka i drugikh natsraionov,” Mar. 1921, *Sbornik postanovlenii o promyslovoi kooperatsii i kustarnoi promyshlennosti*, Ed. A.S. Vashkov (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Sovnarkoma UzSSR, 1936), 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

the fundamental weapons for emancipating women and involving them in active socialist construction as an organized, productive force.”⁴⁹ From its advent, the policy of incorporating local producers and local products into the Soviet economy was surrounded by an eclectic amalgamation of motivations and justifications, a fact which seems to have helped secure that policy’s durability over time in spite of dramatically changing state priorities.

On the cusp of the First Five-Year Plan, economist Viacheslav Balkov compiled a study of the artisanal industries of Central Asia which was hailed by its publishers as one of the few truly Marxist analyses of the region’s economic situation. The study summarized the eclectic agglomeration of state interests that mandated official support for artisanal production of national goods in Central Asia. Balkov argued that the petty artisanal producers of Central Asia fell into the category of “middle peasants” (*seredniaki*) rather than wealthy peasants inherently hostile to Soviet rule. Given their position, situated halfway between the presumably pro-Soviet poor peasants and the anti-Soviet exploiters, Balkov predicted two possible paths for their future: “either subjection to the power and influence of merchant capital and... growth into a petty-capitalist type of enterprise, or the producers’ cooperative and collective development of activities with the active support of the proletarian state.”⁵⁰ In addition to preventing artisans from becoming the Soviet state’s political and economic enemies, such “active support” and cooperativization would make use of the “excess labor force of the village” and serve as a source of consumer goods to combat the “famine of manufactured goods [*manufakturnym golodom*]” suffered by rural populations throughout the USSR in 1927. Finally, Balkov raised the matter of the ethno-cultural specificity of the goods these artisans produced. Clothing and hygiene products in

⁴⁹ RGASPI F. 62, Op. 2, d. 1325, 173. See also “O meropriiatiakh po kooperirovaniu zhenshchin, zanimaiushchikhsia kustarnymi promyslami,” 3 May 1929, *Sbornik postanovlenii o promyslovoi kooperatsii i kustarnoi promyshlennosti*, ed. A.S. Vashkov (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Sovnarkoma UzSSR, 1936), 158; RGASPI F. 62, Op. 2, d. 657, 24.

⁵⁰ Viacheslav Balkov, *Kustarno-remeslennaia promyshlennost' Srednei Azii. Istoriia, sovremenaia organizatsiia i perspektivy melkoi promyshlennosti* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo SAKU, 1927), 160.

the region, he asserted, “carry the imprint of local national culture, the local way of life, local tastes and specificities.”⁵¹ For this reason, local artisanal production of these items would remain a necessity “until the adjustment of factory products to local demand has occurred, until the overcoat and European suit appear in the place of the traditional robe and conventional costume of the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz.”⁵² Balkov spells out the implied content of many early Soviet discussions of Central Asian national goods: ethno-cultural differences in material culture are accepted as fact, without a strongly judgmental tone or concrete policies directed at cultural Europeanization, but nevertheless with a firm assumption that such differences will automatically and naturally fall away over time as part of the inevitable process of modernization. Even here, there is surprisingly little discussion of or theoretical justification for these points; in some ways they resemble underlying assumptions more than argumentative propositions. Characteristically for the 1920s, state support for national goods production is framed both as temporary and as a concession to necessity. The positive affirmations of national specificities and effusive praise of national art that would begin to appear in the mid- to late 1930s are noticeably lacking.

Arguably most important of all as a short-term, ad hoc goal driving early policy considerations, though, was the potential for Central Asian handicrafts to serve as products for foreign export. Aside from the purely local benefits of Central Asian artisanal industry, Balkov was sure to make note of “the value and general European significance of products of the [Central Asian] carpet-making trade.”⁵³ Already before the civil war had come fully to a close in 1920, the Soviet leadership had begun to explore the export potential of artisanal handicrafts produced throughout the USSR, aspiring to organize the export of “Turkmen, Azerbaijani, and Dagestani rugs, Ukrainian and Russian folk embroidery, Russian

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

lace, jewelry from Dagestan and Tataria, ceramic goods, wooden goods with Khokhloma carving, toys from Bogorodskoe, and bone goods from Tobol’.”⁵⁴ With the transition to Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan in 1928, discussions about exporting Central Asian products abroad, particularly to Western collectors and enthusiasts, grew in frequency and urgency. In the context of the state’s hunger for foreign currency to fuel the industrialization drive, arguments in favor of profiting from the taste of foreign consumers for the exotic products of “the East” evidently became more and more appealing to Soviet policy-makers. Ethnically Ukrainian artist and museum director V.K. Rozvadovskii, an energetic advocate for the development of Central Asian crafts during these years, seized on this heightened official interest to lobby for investment in traditional-style Uzbek handicrafts. In his 1928 correspondence with the Sovnarkom of the Uzbek SSR, he claimed, “The international market manifests a lively interest in artistic artisanal products, which was noted recently by the French and especially English press and by official data of the [Soviet] Government.”⁵⁵ He went on to provide figures for the monetary value of exports of artisanal items from Central Asia during some of the last years of the Romanov dynasty; the principal importers during this time had been Germany, France, the U.S., England, Austria, Turkey, and Sweden. Finally, he offered the conclusion, “With the planned reestablishment of its artistic artisanal industry and organizational work in this direction, the Uzbek SSR can have at its disposal a huge quantity of products of artistic artisanal industry, valued at up to 2,000,000 rubles per year.”⁵⁶

Rozvadovskii’s wildly optimistic estimates aside, the most immediately profitable item of export within the Central Asian region was carpets, and particularly Turkmen carpets. A report from Sredazekoso dating from early in the First Five-Year Plan went so far as to state, “Carpets are the only product of Central Asian artisanal trades which have a sufficiently broad market for sale not only within

⁵⁴ V.M. Vasilenko et al., eds., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: “Iskusstvo,” 1984), 165.

⁵⁵ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 5, d. 651, 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

the USSR, but also abroad. Therefore, measures for the revival of this sector of industry gain the character of first-order state importance [*pervoocherednoi gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti*].⁵⁷ Both Moscow-based and regional economic authorities authorized the special provisionment of the Turkmen carpet-making industry during the years of the First Five-Year Plan, including a measure to provide Turkmen carpet-weavers (almost all of them women, and many of them working from home) with a special supply of scarce goods like bread, green tea, sugar, and soap to incentivize fulfillment of the export plan.⁵⁸ The Moscow-based authority over producers' cooperatives throughout the USSR, Vsekopromsoiuz, also issued specific standards to Turkmen carpet-weavers regulating carpets produced for foreign export, prefaced by the statement, "America and England are the main purchasing countries, and they display the following needs."⁵⁹ These included the use of higher-quality vegetable dyes, specific dimensions for carpets to be exported to each country, and the note that less marketable geometric designs "must be driven out." The stark prioritization of export in discussions of Central Asian artisanal crafts during these years thus not only occasioned intense state attention and investment, but also a degree of direct intervention in and centralized control over the design and production processes of these traditional handicrafts.

In the Central Asian republics aside from Turkmenistan, the potential profitability of artisanal crafts as items of export was significantly more dubious. Nonetheless, they too received heightened attention during the years of the First Five-Year Plan. Vsekopromsoiuz chided the producers' cooperative organizations in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for failing to exploit their own (comparatively quite limited) carpet-making industries for export. "In the course of the past year," began a terse 1929 letter from Vsekopromsoiuz to the Uzbek cooperative, "we have made a number of

⁵⁷ TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, d. 1016, 83.

⁵⁸ TsGA RUz F. 9, Op. 1, d. 2638, 39-43.

⁵⁹ GARF F. A-5449, Op. 1, d. 1222, 349.

attempts to communicate with you about providing carpets for export. Unfortunately, not one of our proposals has received a businesslike response from you, despite the presence in your country of a significant carpet-making base.”⁶⁰ The Kyrgyz cooperative, for their part, responded to a demand for information about their carpet-making industry with a reciprocal level of irritability: “You have been repeatedly informed by us that our system does not produce export goods. If you mean our carpet production then, according to the conclusion of Vsekopromsoiuz [itself], it does not have export significance.”⁶¹ The comparative weakness of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz carpet-making industries was borne out in practice; by 1932, while the planned export of Turkmen carpets totaled 55,000 linear meters, the Uzbek plan called for a meager 2000 meters, and the Kyrgyz SSR received no plan for carpet exports.⁶²

In keeping with both the resourcefulness and wild inefficiency of Stalin’s industrialization drive, however, Vsekopromsoiuz was undeterred by this failure of the carpet export plan, and began casting about for other Central Asian artisanal crafts that could potentially be sold for export. This seems fairly transparently to have been an attempt to create a new export product using whatever was lying around, in the sense of what Central Asian artisans had the skills and raw materials to produce, regardless of pre-existing demand for such a product on the foreign market. After a Kyrgyz carpet-making industry failed to materialize on command, the Kyrgyz producers’ cooperative was instructed, essentially, to find *something* to hand over to export organizations to meet the 110,800 ruble export plan for 1931.⁶³ In the case of Uzbekistan, a handful of crafts traditionally produced for local consumers were proposed as potential items of export: embroidered wall-hangings (*so’zanas*), Bukharan robes, silk cloth, and so on.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ GARF F. A-5449, Op. 1, d. 1222, 449.

⁶¹ GARF F. A-5449, Op. 1, d. 1358, 239.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁶⁴ GARF F. A-5449, Op. 1, d. 1222, 416.

Intriguingly, there were even attempts to find new markets for traditional Uzbek silk robes and skull caps in Persia and Afghanistan, where they would presumably be sold to the local populations for everyday use rather than as decorative items for European collectors.⁶⁵ These efforts, too, proved to be unsuccessful, and the 1931 export plan for the Uzbek producers' cooperative was disastrously underfulfilled at 23.1% of the target quota (compared with a more respectable 93.0% for the Turkmen SSR).⁶⁶ In spite of state investment and consistent, aggressive pressure from Moscow, Central Asian handicrafts, with the partial exception of Turkmen carpets, failed to become a profitable item of export to fund the First Five-Year Plan.

But this failure notwithstanding, the production of a variety of Central Asian "national" goods had become established within Soviet institutions and normalized within Soviet policy by the end of 1932. The question of profitability on the export market, while clearly providing an early impetus for interest and investment in Central Asian artisanal crafts on the part of the Soviet leadership in Moscow, did not funnel resources away from less export-friendly Kyrgyz artisanal industry or lead to neglect of local consumer demand. Rather, it seems to have acted as a kind of tent-pole supporting a broader tendency toward accommodation, and to some degree even active promotion, of Central Asian crafts and ethnically specific material culture. In particular, the cultivation of artisanal producers' cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which had originated in the 1920s but continued to grow through the 1950s, created an institutional basis for the integration of traditional craftsmen into the Soviet economy and made their products a subject of state planning quotas. By the time the question of export profitability had fallen by the wayside after 1932, there were already a whole array of other justifications for the support of artisanal trades in Central Asia waiting in the wings to take its place: the needs of local consumers, the utilization of local skilled labor and raw materials, the incorporation of

⁶⁵ GARF F. A-5449, Op. 1, d. 1358, 59, 229.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

Central Asian women into the labor force, and increasingly, the aesthetic qualities of the handicrafts themselves.

From convenient commodity to democratic art form: Central Asian national goods as “folk artistic crafts”

Economic concerns never entirely disappeared from official discussions about the production of Central Asian national goods. Local consumer demand, foreign export, and the efficient utilization of “local raw materials” continued to be cited as factors justifying the policy through the 1970s. But the declining primacy of economic thinking within these discussions is signaled most blatantly by cases when Central Asian factories, producers’ cooperatives, and trade organizations were chided for neglecting national goods or taking them out of production *merely* because they were expensive to produce and sold poorly among local consumers. By 1959, a representative of the Uzbek Union of Artists felt justified in expressing not just disapproval but righteous outrage that economic institutions would pull goods like fabrics “saturated with elements of national design” out of production simply because “in the opinion of trade organizations, fabrics with similar designs will not enjoy demand or success among the population.” Such decisions were symptomatic, the speaker averred, of “viewing products only from the perspective of ‘sales profitability’ [*prodazhnoi rentabel’nosti*], not at all considering their artistic side,” and of an ethos in which “the question of trade [*torgovli*], in the most negative meaning of the word, is higher than everything.”⁶⁷ Indeed, left to their own devices, local economic enterprises would often quietly curtail the production of national goods out of concerns for financial sustainability, and it was in large part the repeated demands from central and republic-level

⁶⁷ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 571, 14-15.

bodies that kept national goods production alive through the end of the Soviet period.⁶⁸ As artisanal production methods and Central Asian styles gradually were ceasing to be the economic path of least resistance, national goods were instead being re-conceptualized as a form of “folk art,” albeit one suitable for mass consumption and use in everyday life, and their crucial place within Soviet artistic theory and nationalities policy came to override their economic costliness.

Early Soviet discussions of handicrafts as a form of “folk art” followed on a pre-revolutionary, late 19th century interest in Russian peasant art and culture among ethnographers, art historians, and other members of the intelligentsia. By the end of the imperial period, both a community of researchers and an academic infrastructure had developed around the topic of peasant handicrafts, and a number of the key thinkers, institutions, and ideas from this period carried over into the Soviet-era 1920s. As Francine Hirsch has observed, the first generation of ethnographers who were enlisted in the project of researching and systematizing knowledge about the Soviet Union's nationalities had been trained in the imperial period and typically maintained their prior academic networks, as well as some of their interests and priorities, through the 1930s.⁶⁹ While pre-revolutionary Russian artists and ethnographers were mainly preoccupied with the folk art of the Russian peasantry, the late imperial period also saw a renewed interest in and attempt to systematically collect and study the handicrafts of the Caucasus, Central Asia, and other subject peoples of the Russian empire. The album of the 1913 All-Russian Artisanal Exhibition, for example, featured 84 images of folk crafts originating from Moscow and surrounding areas, 39 from “Little Russia,” and 22 from the Caucasus and “Asiatic oblasts.”⁷⁰ Like the

⁶⁸ In particular, a series of complaints from higher-standing institutions about the curtailment of national goods production preceded the reiteration of such production as policy in 1968. See, for example, TsGA KR F. 573, Op. 6, d. 556, 73, on Kyrgyz velvet and plush textiles; TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 244, 67-68, on high-quality traditional Khivan carpets; and TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 71, 14, on skull caps and Kyrgyz traditional clothing.

⁶⁹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 2005), 21-24.

⁷⁰ *Russkoe narodnoe iskusstvo na vtoroi Vserossiiskoi kustarnoi vystavke v Petrograde v 1913 g.* (Petrograd: Glavnoe upravlenie zemleustroistva i zemledelii, 1914), ii.

museums and research institutes dedicated to folk art that were established during the late imperial decades, these exhibitions of peasant artisanal handiwork appear to have served as implicit models for later Soviet practices and institutions.

Given the radically modernizing aims of the Bolshevik revolution, not to mention its fraught relationship with the Russian peasantry, it is rather surprising how seamlessly the discussion of Russian folk art and artisanal handicrafts proceeded from the pre-revolutionary period into the Soviet-era 1920s. Art historians and state-aligned cultural figures who advocated for folk art during the early Soviet period tended to posit art as an exception to the general rule of pre-revolutionary backwardness, and this was a position to which the Soviet leadership eventually proved to be sympathetic. Primitive and inhumane systems, advocates of Russian peasant crafts argued, could nevertheless produce art of a universally recognizable quality and resonance. As L.G. Orshanskii wrote in 1927, “The contrast between the backwardness and barbaric forms of the pre-revolutionary socioeconomic and political order and its high artistic and creative achievements is striking.”⁷¹ The most highly placed advocate of Russian handicrafts, former Soviet Commissar of Education A.V. Lunacharskii, went even further in a 1932 foreword to a study of the art of Palekh. He cited Marx to assert not only that “very often high forms of art develop even at a relatively low economic stage,” but that when handicraft production undergoes a transition to the capitalist stage of economic development, this constitutes “a colossal blow to art, invading the sphere of artistic creation with its nakedly commercial and utilitarian methods.”⁷² In the sphere of aesthetics, Lunacharskii suggested, the “evolutionary” movement from artisanal to industrial production in fact represented a step backward. Industry and capitalist technologies were crucial, he acknowledged, for the development of the Soviet state, but nevertheless “the artistic production of the pre-capitalist phase of development is more valuable and agreeable for us.” It was only after

⁷¹ L.G. Orshanskii, *Khudozhestvennaia i kustarnaia promyshlennost' SSSR, 1917-1927* (Leningrad: Izdanie Akademii Khudozhestv, 1927), 3.

⁷² A.V. Bakushinskii, *Iskusstvo Palekha* (Moscow: Izd. Vserossiisk. kooperat. soiuz khudozhnikov, 1932), 3.

completing the transition to the socialist stage of development that high art could again re-emerge from the miasma of the “tastelessness and vulgarity [*besvkusiem i poshlost’iu*] of the bourgeois way of life.” More concretely, the intervention of the Soviet state, particularly in the form of financial support, would be required to “rescue” artisanal peasant handicrafts from “their constriction by factory production and bourgeois habit.” Already visible here, as in the work of other early advocates of peasant crafts, are a number of paradigms which would come to define the Soviet policy of artisanal crafts production over the next several decades: the necessity for political intervention to preserve artistic handicrafts from extinction; the reconceptualization of artisanal peasant work as a populist form of high art; and the displacement of Marxist evolutionary and class-based thinking from the realm of aesthetics.

Initially, the position of Lunacharskii and other advocates of Russian folk art did not go uncontested; proponents of a new industrial, proletarian art balked at the idea of the Soviet state promoting “primitive” peasant handicrafts. At the first Soviet exhibition of Russian peasant crafts held in Moscow in 1923, representatives of the so-called “Industrialist school” (*proizvodstvenniki*) argued that artisanal handicrafts constituted a “survival of the past,” asserting that a truly socialist artistic industry should focus instead on the aesthetic qualities of machines, airplanes, and automobiles.⁷³ But in a trajectory mirroring the downfall of the proletarian RAPP in the literary sphere, it was the “Industrialists” who ultimately lost this battle for official sympathies and political support. As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, “The [Soviet] leadership's attitude toward many established [pre-revolutionary] cultural values was more often deferential than destructive. As party values penetrated culture, the cultural values of the old intelligentsia were penetrating the party.”⁷⁴ Already in 1923, a prominent defender of Russian folk art, Ia. Tugenkhol’d, offered the following rebuke to the Industrialists:

⁷³ Ia. Tugenkhol’d, “Vystavka khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti v Moskve,” *Russkoe iskusstvo* No. 2-3 (1923): 105.

⁷⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1992), 239.

To reduce all of the aesthetic needs of the proletariat to the aestheticization of machines – does this not mean agreeing that the proletariat is no more than appendage to the machine? No, the proletariat needs beautiful and cozy living space, beautiful and comfortable clothing, beautiful and pleasing paintings on the walls of public buildings.⁷⁵

As is clear from the language of many of these appeals – Lunacharskii’s assertion that pre-capitalist art “is more valuable and agreeable for us” and Tugenkhol’d’s appeal to what is “beautiful and pleasing” – what was occurring was in many ways a rejection of the notion of the class specificity of art and the affirmation in its place of a cross-class (in practice, largely nineteenth-century in its origins) aesthetic ideal. At least from the mid-1930s on, it was possible for an argument purely on the grounds of artistic quality, independent of other ideological and economic concerns, to carry weight in Soviet policy-making in the realm of art and folk crafts. In Fitzpatrick’s terms, the Soviet leadership’s preoccupation with aesthetic quality led to a “self-imposed limitation of Communist ideological influence” in the sphere of art and artisanal crafts.⁷⁶ Indeed, when debates arose in cultural institutions in subsequent decades over whether folk art should be modernized or modeled on pre-revolutionary patterns, in Central Asia as in Russia, a startling amount of the discussion centered on the question of which outcome would produce the most beautiful, aesthetically richest, highest form of art, at times at the expense of explicitly “Soviet” content.⁷⁷

The special allowances granted within the sphere of art to the ostensibly “backward” culture of the Russian peasantry created an analogous opening within Soviet thought for a positive valuation of traditional Central Asian artistic culture. This parallelism is already visible in a 1923 issue of the journal *Russkoe Iskusstvo*, in which an article titled “Letter from Turkestan” laid out the unique features of Central Asian art and made a case for its preservation. The distinctiveness of “Muslim” art, the article stated, lies in the fact that it is “flat [*ploskostnoe*]” rather than dimensional and “decorative” rather than

⁷⁵ Tugenkhol’d 106.

⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick 245.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 2.

representational.⁷⁸ It is foreign to concepts like perspective and shading, the author said, but distinguished by a sophisticated use of saturated color, line, ornamental composition, and visual rhythm. The article ended with a call for the Soviet state to devote attention to the preservation of precisely these distinctive characteristics of traditional art in Central Asia, citing both “our [that is, Russians’] instinctive attraction to it” and “our traditional connection to it.” The article concluded, “The East, which is beginning to play a significant role in our social and political life, must without a doubt paint our Soviet culture with its bright and aromatic [sic] colors.” The unintended dissonance in this statement between an appeal to Oriental exoticism and an ostensibly anti-colonial defense of the validity of Central Asian art would become a characteristic feature of Soviet discussions over the ensuing decades.

Even while official policy within Central Asia remained narrowly focused on economic development and export profitability during the 1920s and early 1930s, then, artists, ethnographers, and art historians (most of them ethnic Russians or Ukrainians) with a particular interest in the region’s folk crafts had already begun to follow the lead of their counterparts within Russia in advancing a wide array of more principled, less ad hoc and economically-oriented arguments for the Soviet promotion of Central Asian handicrafts. In their correspondence with the Soviet leadership, it was not uncommon for such advocates to speak in the same breath about export potential, the needs of local consumers, and the value of Central Asian crafts from a purely aesthetic standpoint; at times, the reference to export profits seems to be deliberately planted as an appeal to fundamental state interests amidst an otherwise rarefied paean to national uniqueness and beauty. In one of his numerous letters to the Council of People’s Commissars of the Uzbek Republic, for instance, V.K. Rozvadovskii wrote in 1932, “To speak about and prove the meaning and significance of folk art is not necessary. The art of each people speaks for itself; it is the clearest and most understandable language of the people... Folk art ennobles a person, gives him joy, creates a wellspring of beauty, leads him toward the best questions and strivings.”

⁷⁸ A. Niurenberg, “Pis’mo iz Turkestana,” *Russkoe Iskusstvo* no. 1 (1923): 104.

But immediately afterward, he made sure to reaffirm its more worldly benefits as well: “Objects of artistic artisanal industry serve as a significant benefit for the rural economy, and with sensible, serious organization, they can be an important item of export.” The Council of People’s Commissars evidently took the bait, as this last sentence was underlined in their copy of the letter.⁷⁹

If this particular conflation of domestic and export markets, of spiritual and financial motives, and of objects of art and mass-produced commodities strikes one as somewhat deliberate and strategic on Rozvadovskii’s part, it was also deeply characteristic of the discourse that developed around the production of national goods in the course of the 1930s. When Rozvadovskii spoke of “folk art,” he did not merely mean decorative knick-knacks to be put on display; these were to be commodities intended for mass consumption and daily use. He laid out a plan for the establishment of an “artistic production factory” in Tashkent, and noted that the goods it would produce “must be manufactured with consideration for the possibility of their use in the daily life of the native and European population, and also so that part of them may be sold in Uzbekistan, like for example: dishes used by Europeans and the native population, cupboards, tables, chairs, shelves, wall cabinets, suitcases, fabrics for clothing, table linens, etc.”⁸⁰ He added, “All of these items, depending on their material, [should be] ornamented in an appropriate way: with carving, painting, embossing, embroidery, and so on.” In particular, he recommended the production of a variety of locally-specific items of decoratively painted ceramic dishware for the domestic Uzbek market, including serving platters (Uzb. *lagan*), pitchers (Uzb. *ko’za*), and tea bowls (Uzb. *piyola*).⁸¹

Part of the appeal of folk art and artistic industry within Soviet discourse, in Rozvadovskii’s sense of the mass production of handicrafts intended for popular use, was precisely this blurring of the

⁷⁹ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 10, d. 416, 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

boundaries between the spheres of high art and mundane daily life. Folk crafts, originating from the peasantry and enlivening the population's daily existence and labor with their color and vivid design, were to represent, as Lunacharskii put it, inherently "democratic forms of art."⁸² Reflecting on the 1923 Exhibition of Artistic Industry in Moscow, Tugenkhol'd rhapsodized, "By its very essence, artistic industry is the most powerful tool for the democratization and communalization of art – in other words, for making daily life itself artistic. It is precisely in the plane of artistic industry that it is possible to fulfill the cherished dream of the Russian Revolution: instilling art into life."⁸³ This seemingly utopian goal, it is true, had a certain didactic purpose behind it. If the state could not manage to coax people into museums to imbibe the high culture and socialist aesthetics on display there, it was at least possible to bring art of genuine quality, approved by Soviet gate-keepers of culture, into their homes. Folk art would simultaneously appeal to popular tastes by following familiar (nationally specific) folk designs and ornamental patterns, and serve to "educate" and "elevate" those tastes by presenting consumers with the most refined examples of folk designs.⁸⁴

Didacticism aside, though, the rhetoric in favor of bringing folk art to Soviet consumers, including bringing Central Asian folk art to Central Asian consumers, was not without its genuinely populist and humane impulses. As both Rozvadovskii and Tugenkhol'd passionately argued, it was a question of improving the lives of ordinary people, and this did not mean only "elevating" them culturally, but also simply allowing them to have nice things. The socialist state's cultivation of folk crafts as goods of mass consumption could, it was hoped, achieve a kind of democratization of luxury.⁸⁵

⁸² Qtd. Orshanskii, *Khudozhestvennaia i kustarnaia promyshlennost'*, 75.

⁸³ Tugenkhol'd, "Vystavka Khudozhestvennoi Promyshlennosti v Moskve," 102.

⁸⁴ B. Galanter, "Ob antikhudozhestvennoi striapne," *Pravda*, 12 Oct. 1940, 3; Orshanskii, *Khudozhestvennaia i kustarnaia promyshlennost'*, 75.

⁸⁵ On the democratization of luxury, see Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61/2 (Summer 2002): 233.

As a number of historians have observed, the official rhetoric of the Stalin-era mid-1930s ceased to revere the asceticism of the revolutionary era and instead authorized and promoted the consumption of luxury commodities – champagne, perfumes, lavish home furnishings – by ordinary Soviet people, including even commodities that were associated with the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie.⁸⁶ Intriguingly, in the realm of Central Asian folk crafts, this could also mean making a locally specific version of pre-revolutionary luxury available to the masses. Many of the types of Central Asian handwork designated as “folk crafts” had been accessible predominantly or exclusively to the local elite prior to the revolution. But now, thanks to Soviet rule, the claim went, it was possible for ordinary Central Asian laborers to possess and enjoy indulgences like Bukharan gold stitching, elaborately carved and painted woodwork, and the luxurious Uzbek black-and-white patterned silk *xonatl*s, whose name, according to legend, derived from the fact that it was originally restricted to use solely by the family of the khan (Uzb. *xon*).⁸⁷ Far from being viewed as incompatible with socialism, the broad availability of luxurious goods was framed as socialism’s unique achievement. “In a class society,” one speaker observed at a 1953 conference of the artists of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, “the people – the creators of artistic valuables – were forced to hand over their best works to the summit of the ruling classes or bring them to the altars of temples.” Under socialism, on the other hand, the producers of these luxuries could also be their consumers.⁸⁸ Of course, the universal availability of luxurious hand-crafted objects constituted an optimistic ideal more than a reality, but the claim was by no means completely unfounded; by the 1960s

⁸⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89-93; Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common luxury and the ideals of the good life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003).

⁸⁷ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473, 46; TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 3475, 96; O.A. Sukhareva, “Tkani,” *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil’*, ed. V.A. Nil’sen (Tashkent: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 35.

⁸⁸ TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 96, 172.

and 1970s, Soviet mass production had made many of these goods vastly more accessible, and the previously exclusive *xonatlas* cloth, at least, had become a pervasive fixture of Uzbek everyday life.⁸⁹

For all of this emphasis on the place of folk art within people's homes and daily lives, however, the reconceptualization of Central Asian objects as forms of art could also mean a different, and at times competing, focus on their display in museums and exhibitions. Alongside calls to transform Central Asian handicrafts into an accessible, consumable form of art for the local population, there were parallel initiatives for the creation of a small number of especially high-quality, expensive, unique objects destined specifically for the gallery or the international expo. The intensifying interest in developing the national cultures within each union republic in the middle of the 1930s yielded efforts to reformulate pre-revolutionary Central Asian handicrafts not only as a kind a populist folk art, but also as a nationally specific form of "high art," on par with painting or sculpture. On the one hand, showcasing Central Asian carpets, embroideries, and wood carvings not merely in historical or ethnographic museums but also in art museums may have been intended to convey a powerful message to both foreign and domestic audiences about the Stalinist state's regard for indigenous material cultures and artistic traditions. Participation in international artistic exhibitions, in particular, was seen as both a source of prestige and an opportunity for cultural diplomacy. A visiting Ukrainian official lectured the delegates of the Uzbek artistic producers' union in 1958 that in addition to their task as "preservers of folk traditions" for the local population, they were delegated the "important political task" of participation in international exhibitions in the West, through which their works would "facilitate mutual understanding and connections among peoples of the whole world."⁹⁰ On the other hand, there were more mundane motives at play as well: the display of Central Asian handicrafts at international exhibitions was viewed

⁸⁹ O.A. Sukhareva, "Tkani," *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, 35; "Ko'chalik libosingiz," *Saadat* No. 7, Jul. 1966, 32; D.A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva im. Gafura Guliyama, 1972), 98.

⁹⁰ TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 593, 62.

as a way of boosting export potential, both kindling foreign demand for Central Asian objects and facilitating the establishment of export contracts.⁹¹ Because crafts intended for export to the West tended to be expensive to produce and subject to stringent quality controls, they could be slotted in rather comfortably to the increasingly dominant rhetoric that characterized Central Asian handicrafts as a form of high art.

To summarize, then, around the middle of the 1930s, Soviet authorities began to consistently apply the discourse “folk artistic crafts” to the Central Asian context and enact concrete policies aimed at the protection and further development of local-style handicrafts. Placing traditional, by-hand methods of craftsmanship and their products under the rubric of “art” served to separate them from their objectionable associations with the economic, political, and religious systems of pre-revolutionary Central Asia and remove them from the evolutionary timelines of Marxist thinking. Pioneered by artistic professionals and Soviet officials with an interest in Russian peasant crafts, the concept of artisanal handicrafts as a populist, nationally specific form of art that nevertheless could attain universal standards of artistic quality was picked up in discussions within Central Asia and aggressively encouraged by local advocates like Rozvadovskii. The success of this discourse can be attributed in part to the way that it drew together a diverse assortment of ideologically and pragmatically appealing motives for the Soviet state: the preservation and development of art, the aesthetic and cultural education of the populace, the democratization of luxury, the advancement of Soviet prestige and anti-colonial legitimacy both at home and abroad, the expansion of the foreign export market. But already in 1936, another local proponent of Central Asian crafts, A. Lamakina, was beginning to point out the uncomfortable contradictions among some of these goals. If the aim of folk art was to elevate the cultural level of the people, then “the consciousness of the prosperous collective farmer must not stabilize at the level of pre-revolutionary *bai* tastes.” Even more importantly, attempts to accommodate

⁹¹ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 62, 112.

Western tastes on the export market should not lead to a fetishization of “antiquity and exoticness” at the expense of contemporary relevance and populist appeal among Central Asian consumers themselves.⁹² Although remaining mostly submerged during the Stalin era, these tensions within state policy and discourse – between the modernization of Central Asian crafts and the preservation of traditions, between the demands of “high art” and the demands of Central Asian consumers, and between ethnic authenticity and ostensible ethnic kitsch – erupted under Khrushchev and Brezhnev into a series of debates about Central Asian material culture and its place within a modern socialist society. These debates will be the subject of Chapter 2.

Nationalities discourse and the canonization of Central Asian material cultures

Thus far, I have only briefly touched on the relationship between national goods production and Soviet attitudes toward nationality and ethno-cultural difference, despite the fact that those attitudes in many ways undergird all of the preceding policy discussions and are, in a sense, their necessary precondition. But until the middle of the 1930s, the relationship between national goods production and nationality policy was left largely implicit and under-theorized in official rhetoric. Certainly, beliefs about nationality were already at play alongside purely economic thinking; the operative assumption from the earliest years of Soviet rule in the region seems to have been that the material demands (or “needs”) of Central Asian populations differed from those of ethnic Russians, and that this was a natural and acceptable state of affairs – at least for the time being. But in the mid-1930s, the national-ness of national goods suddenly became a pivotal component of official discussions, and not as a liability, but rather as a source of their unique value. In tandem with developing ideas about Central Asian folk crafts as a form of “folk art,” traditional objects and designs were increasingly conceptualized as a unique expression of each nation’s character and creative potential, its particular and irreplaceable

⁹² TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473, 19-20.

“contribution to the treasure-house of world culture,” in Stalin’s famous phrase. In accordance with this rhetoric, state initiatives no longer focused on opportunistically developing only the most economically promising sources of artistic crafts, but instead on developing characteristic artistic crafts among the populations of every national republic and autonomous region of the Soviet Union. This universalized version of the policy, emphasizing the unique material cultural traditions of every Soviet people, is the one that prevailed over the long term. To give one example from beyond the borders of Central Asia, by the 1970s, the Iakut ASSR in Russia’s far north was engaged in the production of a whole array of crafts traditional to the region’s indigenous population – carved wooden dishware, fur-lined clothing, ornaments carved from antler and bone.⁹³ The universality of this policy became one of its most crucial elements, both from the perspective of ideological and aesthetic motives – the necessity of rescuing from extinction, revitalizing, and developing the unique artistic forms of all of the peoples of the Soviet Union – and from the perspective of propaganda for an international and domestic audience – demonstrating the Soviet system’s magnanimous, egalitarian rule, its anti-colonial policy not of oppressing non-Russian peoples but of actively facilitating their flourishing and the achievement of their fullest cultural potential.

A comparison between the timing of the most direct and concerted initiatives to develop “folk artistic crafts” in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz SSRs underscores this transition in Soviet policy from immediate economic and export concerns to a more wide-ranging set of ideological, aesthetic, and propaganda motives. Throughout the 1920s and the years of the First Five-Year Plan, as we have seen, initiatives for the development of folk crafts tended to devote the most attention to those Central Asian republics with the greatest potential for short-term export profitability – specifically Turkmenistan and, to a much lesser extent, Uzbekistan. Areas with more weakly developed and minimally commercialized artisanal

⁹³ N.Kh. D’iakonov, *Proizvodstvo tovarov narodnogo potrebleniia v Iakutskoi ASSR* (Iakutsk: Iakutskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1977), 34-35, 46.

industries, like Kyrgyzstan, were comparatively neglected. After the rather pitiful end to discussions about the Kyrgyz carpet-making industry in 1932, the potential benefits of artisanal production in Kyrgyzstan would occasionally re-emerge in policy discussions, but as a long-term theoretical goal with relatively little immediate action. In this respect, the years between approximately 1936 and 1938 represented a turning point, with the sudden and repeated surfacing of state demands for the development of folk artistic crafts in Kyrgyzstan. Rather abruptly in March of 1936, in response to a January decree of the all-union Council of People’s Commissars titled “On the expansion of production of consumer goods by producers’ cooperatives and invalid cooperatives,” the Kyrgyz republican authorities issued an order that called not only for the artisanal producers’ cooperative to expand its activities, but specifically for “the organization of tradesmen for the manufacture of *shyrdaks* [Kyrg., felt rugs], *tush-kiyiz* [Kyrg., embroidered wall-hangings], *ayalkat* [probably Kyrg. *ayakkap*, embroidered or appliqued sacks used for storage of dishes and other objects in a nomadic yurt], and similar goods of mass consumption and household use.”⁹⁴

The 1936 decree was part of a broader push for national goods production within the Kyrgyz SSR, which closely adhered to the eclectic array of motives in the discussions on “folk artistic crafts” in Russia, Uzbekistan, and elsewhere. On the one hand, there was a desire to expand the availability of these crafts for local consumers, visible in a 1938 decree which complained, “Trades for the manufacture of the national assortment of consumer goods – national dresses, clothing, headwear, dishware, and objects of household use – are not at all sufficiently developed.”⁹⁵ On the other hand, there was a push to produce a small number of unique objects for international exhibitions – in this case, primarily the 1937 exhibition in Paris. The specific list of Kyrgyz crafts that the administration of

⁹⁴ It is not clear what served as the immediate catalyst for this call for the production of a specific set of traditional Kyrgyz handicrafts. The decree of the all-union Sovnarkom in January had mentioned cooperativizing artisans and expanding the production of consumer goods, but had not specified nationally distinctive handicrafts. TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 32, 40.

⁹⁵ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 95, 45.

the producers' cooperative demanded for this exhibition included many of the same items cited in earlier decrees – *shyrdaks*, *tush-kiyiz*, carved wooden dishware – but in this case, specifications for the design of these objects reflected the propaganda motives behind their display abroad: in addition to adornment with “embroidery in the best Kyrgyz ornamentation,” works destined for the exhibition were supposed to show “embroidered portraits of the leaders Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin” as well as depictions of “the natural wealth and modern productive processes of Kyrgyzstan.”⁹⁶

Prior to this point, discussions of Central Asian national goods and folk crafts had tended to address issues of “national culture” and ethno-cultural difference only obliquely or in passing. The resurgence of interest in Kyrgyz handicrafts, by contrast, rode on a wave of a broader Stalin-era interest in and promotion of national cultures. Terry Martin notes that the mid-1930s witnessed a “gradual turn toward a primordial conception of nationality” within Soviet thinking and policy, leading to “an intensified cultivation of the separate and historically deep national identities of the recognized Soviet nationalities, both Russians and non-Russians.”⁹⁷ Within this context, the “folk” (*narodnyi*) element of “folk artistic crafts” came to imply not only their status as a populist, democratic art form, but also their connection to the unique culture of the nation. The intersection between a Soviet artistic policy that highly esteemed pre-revolutionary achievements and the “ethnophilia” of the nationalities policy of the 1930s meant that art, handicrafts, and material culture became spheres in which national distinctiveness was not merely permissible, but in some cases even obligatory.⁹⁸ Francine Hirsch has argued that Soviet nationalities policy should be understood purely in terms of its ultimate goal of the “merging together” (*sliianie*) of nations, in essence entailing the effacement of ethno-cultural difference;

⁹⁶ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 19, 229.

⁹⁷ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 432.

⁹⁸ The term “ethnophilia” is borrowed from Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53/2 (Summer 1994): 415.

the official promotion of national distinctiveness was, she asserts, purely temporary and conditional, part of a program of “state-sponsored evolutionism” that would lead backward peoples from nationalism to internationalism.⁹⁹ While this perhaps represents the most theoretically consistent version of Soviet thinking about nationalities, in practice, the middle of the 1930s saw the appearance of a competing strain in official discourse which treated certain select elements of national distinctiveness as valuable in themselves, to be deliberately preserved through state action in direct contravention of processes that might otherwise evolve them out of existence. By 1948, Stalin would offer what would become the definitive version of the diversity-positive approach to ethno-cultural difference within the Soviet Union. His statement was frequently cited not only during his lifetime, but (increasingly without direct attribution) through the 1960s and 1970s as well: “Every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it and which other nations do not have. These peculiarities form a contribution that each nation makes to the common treasure-house of world culture, adding to it and enriching it.”¹⁰⁰ In this formulation, the visible and persistent differences between Russians and non-Russians were imagined not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a source of unique richness and value in Soviet life. While Moscow-based rhetoric and policy continued to enforce a hierarchy of Soviet cultures with Russia as the “first among equals,” the concept that every Soviet nation could offer something unique to world culture became the foundation for an alternative vision of the socialist future that was less hierarchical and more skeptical of homogenization, in which “the best aspects” of Central Asian art and culture would occupy a valid and valuable place, and in which their loss would not entail a progressive development but an impoverishment of the colorful and variegated “friendship of peoples.”

⁹⁹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8-9.

¹⁰⁰ Qtd. Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 449.

Following on this shift in rhetoric and policy, there was an upsurge of official interest in studying and standardizing Central Asian “national design,” not only preserving national forms of material culture and craftsmanship but also, in a sense, consecrating them. As with other efforts to canonize Soviet national cultures, the process of officially defining Central Asian “national forms” involved a certain narrowing and standardization of local artistic practices, as well as a degree of distortion to fit within the geographical boundaries of the Soviet republics as they currently stood. Professional artists and ethnographers worked within state research institutes to define an “authentic” folk art for each Central Asian republic, solidifying the boundaries of the “national” and attempting to draw clear distinctions from the artistic cultures of other peoples, both within the Soviet Union and outside of its borders. A three-month ethnographic expedition in Kyrgyzstan in 1940, for example, found that Kyrgyz crafts were suffering from “the ignorant [*bezgramotnogo*] distortion of Kyrgyz artistic style,” in particular “its confusion with Kazakh and Uzbek forms.”¹⁰¹ Research on Uzbek national ornamentation in Tashkent, a 1941 *Pravda* article claimed, “has helped to free Uzbek designs from Iranian and Chinese accretions.”¹⁰²

But it is important to note that these efforts to manipulate artistic canons to correspond with the ascribed boundaries of Soviet nationalities were only one part of an earnest, and in many respects quite effective, program of artistic preservation. The mid-1930s saw the establishment of a cluster of institutions for the study of the uniquely national aspects of design and ornamentation in the Central Asian republics. In Kyrgyzstan, an “Art Factory-School” (*khudozhestvennogo uchebno-proizvodstvennogo kombinata*) was founded in the northern city of Tokmok in 1938, tasked with “the full restoration [*vossozdanie*] of national art, its further development, and the transmission of the experience of the old masters to a new generation.”¹⁰³ In Uzbekistan, an analogous factory-school had

¹⁰¹ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 201, 2.

¹⁰² “Izuchenie narodnykh remesel,” *Pravda*, 14 May 1941, 4.

¹⁰³ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 10 d. 2, 41.

existed in Samarkand as early as 1930, but as in Kyrgyzstan, it was experiencing a new wave of activity between 1936 and 1938, in connection with the series of Soviet and international exhibitions during those years in Moscow, Paris, and New York. Part of the purpose of these institutions was to seek out master craftsmen, some of whom had been trained in the pre-revolutionary period, and offer them employment as experts within their trades and teachers for a new cohort of artisans, thereby ensuring that this indigenous artistic expertise would be preserved and transmitted to future generations (Figure 1.6). At the same time, these institutions were interested in collecting samples of pre-revolutionary handwork, not only to be stored and displayed in museums, but also to be studied for a better grasp of traditional principles of design and ornamentation. Give or take some institutional reshuffling, official bodies continued to perform – and, to no small extent, to achieve – these functions through the end of the Soviet period. A 1974 article in the Uzbek press profiled an ethnically Uzbek master of the traditional art of *abr* silk weaving, Solijon Tashpulatov, and described his efforts to innovate on the basis of “ancient,” pre-revolutionary aesthetic principles in his work as part of a Soviet production workshop in Marg’ilon: “Studying the bright coloring of ancient artworks, Solijon-ata creates new designs of *abr* fabrics... Tashpulatov is again planning to visit Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva in order to glean something previously unnoticed in the works of ancient masters and be inspired by their art.”¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to study and canonize a Central Asian national style during the Stalin era was carried out by the (ethnically Russian) art historian and director of the Kyrgyz Art Factory-School, M.V. Ryndin. In 1948, Ryndin published an album titled *Kyrgyz National Design (Kirgizskii Natsional’nyi Uzor)*, which purported to lay out, in meticulous detail, the graphical elements that made up the ornamentation of traditional Kyrgyz embroideries, carvings, felt wall-hangings, and so

¹⁰⁴ I. Korolev, “Averbandshchiki,” *Ekonomika i zhizn’* [Tashkent] no. 3 (Mar. 1974): 56-57.



Figure 1.6. Training a new generation in the creation of the Uzbek embroidered *so'zana*. Caption: "Ra'noxon Olloberganova teaches her students how to create beautiful things." Source: N. Shalamova, "Go'zallik bunyodkorlari," photo by Sh. Ibrohimov, *Sodat* no. 11 (Nov. 1974): 12.

on.¹⁰⁵ Ryndin's work is symptomatic of the tense mixture of art-historical preservation and statist, semi-colonial codification that characterized the Soviet approach to national art and material culture during the 1930s and 1940s. Conducting his research with the help of the ethnically Kyrgyz artisanal embroiderer Sura Asyrbekova, Ryndin argued that "authentic" Kyrgyz design carried an innate affinity with the state-approved aesthetic of "socialist realism" because, in spite of Islamic influences that had pushed it to mask its representational tendencies, it was "fundamentally realistic [*realisticheskim v osnove*]." In his album, he compiled not only examples of complete designs of Kyrgyz *shyrdaks*, *tushkiyiz*, metal engravings, and so on, but also a "glossary" of 173 individual ornamental components,

¹⁰⁵ *Kirgizskii natsional'nyi uzor*, Ed. M.V. Ryndin and I.A. Orbeli (Frunze: Kirgizskii filial Akademii nauk SSSR i Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh, 1948).

corresponding with real-world objects, out of which these designs were supposedly constituted: stylized rams, people, suns, yurts, boats, flowers. Here he included two “Soviet emblems” which, he claimed, “have entered Kyrgyz design as fundamental elements” – the five-pointed star and the sickle and hammer.¹⁰⁶ In some ways, then, Ryndin’s work sought to mold Kyrgyz folk art into a form that was broadly compatible with Soviet power and its ideals. But while engaging in a limited attempt to “Sovietize” Kyrgyz design, both discursively and through the direct insertion of Soviet visual signifiers, Ryndin’s album also made the argument that Kyrgyz folk art was a living, dynamic, expressive artistic medium with continued relevance in the socialist present.

The tension between the preservation of Central Asian artistic and material cultures and efforts to exert Soviet influence over them was epitomized in the so-called “artist-master” relationship, which took root during these years in the newly established institutions for the study and manufacture of Central Asian artistic crafts. Artists (*khudozhniki*) were professionally educated, usually ethnically Russian or otherwise non-Central Asian, and were often employed within economic institutions as authorities on aesthetic quality and Soviet theories of design. Masters (*mastera*), by contrast, were skilled artisans, almost always ethnically Central Asian and frequently women, who were regarded as experts in particular crafts, possessing an inherited knowledge of traditional production processes and an innate instinct for national ornamentation. Ryndin’s collaboration with the master embroiderer Asyrbekova in the creation of his album on Kyrgyz design offers one demonstration of this pattern, along with its implicit hierarchies of ethnicity and gender. In its ideal form, a report by the vice-chairman of the Uzbek Union of Artists explained, “the creative concord of Russian professional artists and Uzbek folk masters mutually enriches both,” with each ostensibly correcting for the other’s mistakes.¹⁰⁷ While the master artisans (the Russian term is *masteritsy*, indicating they were women) lacked “artistic literacy

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁷ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473, 53.

and knowledge of the whole artistic heritage of Uzbekistan and the historical paths of its development,” another Uzbek report explained, by the same token, “many artists’ lack of knowledge of Uzbek folk ornamentation and sewing techniques has cheapened their work.”¹⁰⁸ While the balance of power in this relationship shifted over time, as a general rule it was understood in hierarchical terms, with the professional Russian “artist” in a supervisory position over the Central Asian “master” and with a greater authority to define and shape artistic norms. In part, the story of the Soviet institutionalization of folk crafts production is one in which the process of design, now shifted to some extent into the hands of non-Central Asian professional artists, became increasingly separated from the process of production. In the worst case, as a critical 1961 analysis put it, Central Asian artisans became “merely the executors of the designs prepared by the artists.”¹⁰⁹ Yet in spite of these constrictions on the creative freedom of Central Asian artisans, a number of them gained prominence and acclaim within the Soviet press precisely for their creation of aesthetically pleasing or innovative designs, and many more continued to work under the table (or, as a 1958 Soviet ethnographic study preferred to put it, “in their free time”), directly on order from consumers and without institutional mediation, as they had prior to the Soviet period.¹¹⁰ Central Asian artisans’ integration into Soviet institutions after the mid-1930s could, in fact, bring with it considerable rewards: their trades, and the transmission of their knowledge to younger generations, received financial and institutional support from the state; many of them, including ones who had initially gained prominence before the Bolshevik revolution, became members of the Union of Artists and thus a part of Central Asia’s cultural intelligentsia; and the most successful of them were

¹⁰⁸ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 116, 131.

¹⁰⁹ G.L. Chepelevetskaia, *Suzani Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudhozestvennoi literatury UzSSR, 1961), 89-90.

¹¹⁰ S.M. Abramzon, et al., *Byt kolkhoznikov kirgizskikh selenii Darkhan i Chichkan* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), 126.

showered with state prizes, financial rewards, prestige, and fame within their home republics and beyond.¹¹¹

Terror, “wrecking on the cultural front,” and the affirmation of national folk art. From the effusive celebrations of diversity and cultural uniqueness that Stalin-era officials offered as justifications for the development of folk crafts, it might be difficult to guess that the renewed push for nationally particularistic folk art was roughly contemporaneous with Stalin’s 1937-1938 Great Terror. On the one hand, this is less of a contradiction than it may sound; as Terry Martin has argued, Soviet “soft-line” policies of promoting non-Russian cultures did not disappear in the face of terror against national elites, but instead persisted quietly alongside it.¹¹² On the other hand, it is striking that discussions of Central Asian folk handicrafts during these years did not stand outside of the atmosphere of terror, but incorporated its hysterical language – “enemies of the people,” “wreckers,” “alien elements,” and so on – in institutions ranging from republican governing bodies to local artisanal producers’ cooperatives.¹¹³ In some sense, this fact says more about the inescapable witch-hunting atmosphere during these years than it does about the policy of national goods production itself. The outcome, however, was that despite initial confusions about the acceptable limits of ethno-cultural expression among non-Russian peoples, the terror provided an occasion for Moscow to set hard lines on acceptable discourse, for the first time clearly formulating the approach to national artistic cultures that would become the Stalin-era status quo.

Within Central Asian institutions, representatives of diametrically opposed sides of the debate on traditional material cultures – both partisans of Russification and advocates of Central Asian cultural

¹¹¹ V.M. Vasilenko et al., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: “Iskusstvo,” 1984), 170.

¹¹² Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 341.

¹¹³ For some examples of accusations of “wrecking” leveled within the Kyrgyz producers’ cooperative, see TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 19, pp. 47, 73. In one sensational case, the members of the artel “Vympel,” which “consisted of 90% Koreans,” were accused of engaging in opium smuggling and arrested en masse by the NKVD. *Ibid.*, 68.

preservation – initially felt free to throw accusations of political deviation at their opponents. This fact demonstrates a profound lack of clarity as to what the official line of the moment actually was in the wake of the gradual turn toward accommodation of ethnic particularism over the course of the 1930s. One official (incidentally, with the Kazakh surname Kazangapov) leveraged the language of the terror in support of a Russocentric vision of Soviet culture, claiming that the influence of “enemies of the people” in the administration of Osh’s Uzbek theater was responsible for “setting the theater on an incorrect route, creating in it a sense of superiority and self-satisfaction and a complete break from the art of the great Russian people.”¹¹⁴ But another official used the same language to attack what he saw as excessive Russian influence, arguing that the lack of individual theaters to house Frunze’s theatrical collectives was “exclusively due to wrecking on the art front” and attributable to a fifteen-year period during which Kyrgyzstan “has been run by enemies of the people, who have in every way hampered the growth of Kyrgyz art.”¹¹⁵ By the time the terror had been curtailed in February 1939, a letter from a representative of the Kyrgyz republican government to the Moscow authorities gloated that the purges had successfully swept away the previous administration, which had consistently undermined Kyrgyz cultural specificity: “In connection with the fact that the former administration [of the Kyrgyz Council of People’s Commissars] – enemies of the people – paid no attention to the question of preserving national art, it has fallen into decline.” The present administration, by contrast, had begun pursuing measures “with the goal of restoring folk national art.”¹¹⁶

In spite of this free-for-all atmosphere of mutual recrimination and accusation, the experience of the terror and its aftermath ultimately served to crystallize the Stalin-era official line on Central Asian national goods, and on ethno-cultural difference more broadly. A powerful signal from the center

¹¹⁴ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 10, d. 2, 7.

¹¹⁵ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 1, d. 17, 1.

¹¹⁶ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 10, d. 2, 41.

arrived in the form of an article printed in *Izvestiia* on April 18, 1938, titled “The art of a free people.” On its face, it was an approving evaluation of a recent festival of Azerbaijani art held in Moscow, closely resembling the innumerable other glowing accounts of inter-republic cultural exchanges that served to pad out Soviet newspapers. But the fact that a clipping of this particular text was preserved in the files of the Uzbek Council of People’s Commissars, in a section related to the development of Uzbek artistic industry, indicates that Central Asian officials recognized its larger resonance and status as a kind of pseudo-policy statement.¹¹⁷ The key passage placed Moscow’s stamp of approval on one particular use of the lethal label “enemy” as it applied to the sphere of national art and culture:

In vain, enemies of all stripes and colors have howled about the sun setting on folk art [after the socialist revolution]. Cunning “theories” about the feudal character of the ancient epic [*bylinnogo eposa*] were invented only in order to cross out a whole period in the history of folk art, to deprive the masses of their lawful inheritance [*lishit’ massy ikh zakonnogo nasledstva*].

Here, the term “enemy” was reserved not for those who downplayed Russian leadership in the fields of culture and art, but for those who erred too far in advocating (Russifying) cultural modernization and homogenization. The Azerbaijani artists and performers at the Moscow festival had proven, the article asserted, that the pre-revolutionary folk cultures of the peoples of the Caucasus were not incompatible with Soviet socialism; on the contrary, “there exists a continuous connection between the creations of the people, separated from us by the space of centuries, and modernity.” If in many ways this formulation resembles the rhetoric that had been developing over the course of the 1930s, it is striking, first, in the way that it leveraged the toxic atmosphere of the terror in service of a defense of art-historical preservation and national specificity, and second, in the language of “lawful inheritance,” which verged on framing national art less as a privilege magnanimously bestowed by the Stalinist state than as a right adhering to Soviet nationalities. Of course, the idea that there was a “right” to national cultural expression carried no legal force, but as a rhetorical device, it would periodically resurface

¹¹⁷ The file in question is TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473. The original article is “Iskusstvo svobodnogo naroda,” published in *Izvestiia* no. 91, 18 Apr. 1938.

throughout the post-Stalin decades. For the moment, in 1938, it made clear to readers, including republic-level Central Asian officials, not only that the pursuit of traditional art styles and genres in non-Russian Soviet republics was permissible, but also that attacking these art styles as “feudal” or out of step with socialist modernity was not. The focus on Azerbaijan is especially significant in this respect; it explicitly extended this principle even to the historically Muslim, culturally “backward” republics of the Caucasus and, by analogy, to Central Asia.

A few years later, on the eve of the Second World War, the Stalin-era official line on Central Asian national cultures received perhaps its most concise official formulation in a March 1940 report for the Uzbek Union of Artists titled “Socialist Art and the Folk Masters of Uzbekistan.” The document consists of a list of twenty “theses,” which lay out a set of basic premises underlying the Soviet approach to Central Asian art, material culture, and the legacies of the pre-revolutionary past. After reiterating in the first “thesis” that Soviet Central Asian cultures were to be “national in form and socialist in content,” the list went on to frame the relationship between the “national” and the “socialist” in a novel way, citing excerpts from Lenin and Stalin as support:

2. Proletarian universal [*obshchechelovecheskaia*] culture does not exclude, but presupposes and feeds national culture, just as national culture does not reject, but supplements and enriches all-proletarian [*obshcheproletarskuiu*] culture. (I. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional’no-kolonial’nyi vopros*.)
3. Building and developing its socialist culture, the Uzbek people does not discard the cultural wealth created in the past by its best sons. The absolute rejection of all cultural achievements of the past has nothing in common with Marxism, which on the contrary adopted and reworked all that was intelligent in the more than two thousand-year history of human thought and culture. (V. Lenin, *O proletarskoi kul’ture*, t. XXV, str. 409.)¹¹⁸

The characteristic features of this discourse were, first, the space that was explicitly created and defended for national cultural difference, and second, a calculated ambivalence about what the limits of acceptable difference might be. National cultures, including pre-revolutionary Uzbek culture, were not

¹¹⁸ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 132, 25.

to be rejected or discarded, but remained subject to vague constraints – the formula “national in form and socialist in content,” the requirement to “supplement and enrich all-proletarian culture.” Nevertheless, later in the document, the language of the terror was invoked to settle certain hard limits on what constituted acceptable Soviet discourse on national cultures and their pre-revolutionary roots. It drew one line at a religious or anti-Soviet form of localism, and another at total homogenization and rupture from pre-revolutionary culture. On the one hand, according to the fifth point on the list, “Bourgeois nationalist wreckers closed the path toward progressive adoption of the cultural achievements of the great representatives of the cultural past of the Uzbek people by portraying them as mystics and partisans of national isolation.” On the other hand, “Another form of wrecking on the cultural front was the absolute rejection of the cultural heritage,” and only after the successful elimination of “enemies of the people” did it become possible to fully study the cultural achievements of the Uzbek past and incorporate them into Soviet life.¹¹⁹

If these statements rightly strike one as largely theoretical and rhetorical in nature, the explicit linking of the question of national cultures to the “folk masters of Uzbekistan” in the document’s title lent the issue of the preservation of pre-revolutionary Central Asian cultures a certain concreteness and materiality. The above-mentioned principles were not being applied only to national culture in an abstract or purely symbolic sense, but also to the continued production and proliferation under Soviet auspices of pre-revolutionary Central Asian objects and forms of craftsmanship. In a formulation that would be repeated endlessly during the post-war decades, the sense of imagined continuity these objects created with the Central Asian past was framed as an asset rather than a liability: “The folk masters of Uzbekistan – builders, carvers, ceramicists, artists, and others – have preserved the best traditions, methods, and mastery from their renowned forbears,” and their works bear the mark of

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

“methods developed over centuries in struggle with climatic and geographical conditions.”¹²⁰ The aesthetic value of the crafts in themselves was supplemented by their value within the nationally-specific daily lives of local consumers, adorning Central Asian homes with “ornamental decorations appropriate for and comprehensible to the popular masses.”

In many respects, the basic scaffolding that would hold up the Soviet policy of national goods production through the 1970s and 1980s was in place by the onset of the Second World War. The production of Central Asian artisanal handicrafts was enshrined under the all-union category of “folk artistic crafts” and justified in the name of a complex array of aesthetic, ideological, and humanitarian ends. In contrast to the short-term economic thinking of earlier policy initiatives, by the middle of the 1930s the policy of producing Central Asian-style goods was becoming ideologically systematized, part of the package of nationality policy benefits applied on an all-union level, and pursued in spite of its economic costs rather than in anticipation of economic benefits. It was during these years that a consistent rhetoric developed for the discussion of national material culture and folk crafts, setting forth the tropes and formulas that would continue to serve as the raw material for official and professional discussions through the remainder of the Soviet period: the unique cultural value found in the “best traditions” of each nationality, the fundamental compatibility between socialist culture and the most authentic, populist version of the Central Asian cultural heritage, and the denial that the Soviet ideals of modernization and internationalism entailed a rejection either of the pre-Soviet past or of ethnic particularity. Within the limits set by these formulas, however, there remained colossal uncertainties. Should Central Asian art and material culture evolve (either naturally or with state help) toward convergence with Russian or European norms, or should its distinctive style be permanently preserved? Where – and when – might one find authentically national Central Asian art – in museums and archaeological sites or on contemporary collective farms, in the twelfth century, the nineteenth, or the

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

twentieth? And to what extent should the preservation of Central Asian art and methods of craftsmanship be accompanied by the preservation of ethno-cultural differences in ways of living, dressing, and behaving? The efforts of officials, art historians, ethnographers, and others within both Russia and Central Asia to answer these questions will be the subject of Chapters 2 and 3.

World War II and De-Stalinization: Challenges to the Stalin-era status quo and its continued durability

Between approximately 1936 and 1940, then, the essential elements of the Stalin-era official line on national cultures and national art had been set in place, creating a resilient and flexible justification for the state-sponsored manufacture of Central Asian-style goods and their sale to local consumers. After 1940, this Stalinist status quo underwent two major challenges – first in the Second World War, and later under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev – during which the future of national goods production in Central Asia was cast briefly into doubt. On one level, these challenges underscore the fact that national goods production was not a top-priority Soviet goal, and thus could be subject to rapid constriction and neglect when official attention turned to more pressing matters. Yet it is a testament to the durability of this policy, and in particular to the increasingly firm place it occupied in Soviet thinking about nationalities, that in both cases the temporary lapse was followed by a reaffirmation of national art and a renewed push for national goods production initiated by central or republic-level state authorities.

In the months following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, in the context of the transition toward a fully mobilized wartime economy, state production of consumer goods in general and of expensive and labor-intensive “artistic crafts” in particular died back, as institutions were reshuffled and resources were redirected toward military production. The artisanal cooperatives that continued to exist in Central Asia during these years struggled to sustain their output in the face of the loss of much of the male labor force, growing difficulties of transport, and the total absence of high-

quality raw materials. In Kyrgyzstan, the problem of transporting goods around the republic during wartime became so dire that one representative of a ceramics factory pleaded with the Producers' Cooperative, "We need to be allowed to buy a pair of oxen and then we will be able to supply the population with ceramic goods."¹²¹ Faced with the impossibility of producing new goods using the materials available, some cooperativized producers of clothing, shoes, and dishware shifted their focus toward repair services instead: "We are not producing new goods at present, because we must first of all satisfy the needs of the front, therefore we are forced to repair the old."¹²² Both in Kyrgyzstan and in Uzbekistan, the art factory-schools that had been established in the 1930s for national goods research and production were closed down entirely.¹²³ To what extent this drastic curtailment of state investment and institutional support led to a decline in the availability of national-style goods for Central Asian consumers is unclear; a number of Soviet-era histories claim that artisanal activity (presumably unregulated) in fact flourished during wartime, as local craftsmen worked to compensate for the severely diminished factory production of necessary everyday items.¹²⁴ It seems safe to assume, as well, that the non-commercial home production of some of these goods, which had never entirely disappeared, would have expanded to make up for the decreased supply in Soviet shops. From the standpoint of Soviet policy, however, this represented the first major break in the status quo that had been growing increasingly firmly entrenched over the course of the 1930s.

As significant as this break was, however, what is most striking is how briefly it lasted. Already in August of 1943, when the war had begun to swing in the Soviet Union's favor but was by no means

¹²¹ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 254, 1.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²³ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 3475, 96.

¹²⁴ D.A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Iz-vo literatury i iskusstva im. Gafura Guliyama, 1972), 90; O.A. Sukhareva, "Tkani," in *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 39.

won, a decree of the Uzbek Communist Party and Council of People's Commissars reiterated the state's commitment to support the production of Uzbek national crafts, re-opening the republic's art factory-school and establishing a specialized administration for cooperativized producers of "artistic" goods (Uzkhudozhpromsoiuz). This new organization incorporated 4,550 artisans, many of whom had been working outside of their area of specialization during the first years of the war, with skilled embroiderers, for example, forced to find work as seamstresses.¹²⁵ Now, despite continued raw materials shortages and financial limitations, these artisans were set to work producing such decorative national items as Uzbek embroidered *so'zanas* (1,958 by machine and 20 by hand over the course of 1944), skull caps (149,000 in 1944), and silk cloth (599,000 meters in 1944, mostly of lower-quality and part-silk varieties rather than *atlas* and *xonatlas*).¹²⁶ Not long afterward, in October of 1944, the Kyrgyz republican party and state issued a similarly decisive decree, re-establishing the republic's art factory-school, converting a ceramics factory in the capital city to "artistic" production, calling for the supply of high-quality velvet, silk, wool, and dyes to the Producers' Cooperative for the production of national textiles and embroideries, and earmarking 100,000 rubles for the acquisition of "works of folk creation (*shyrdaks, tush-kiyiz, jewelry items, examples of wood carving, and so on*)" to be displayed in museums.¹²⁷

The curious decision to divert resources and production capacities (however modest) toward the "luxury" production of Central Asian artistic crafts while the war was still raging might be best understood in the context of the Soviet state's efforts to propagandistically appeal to nationalities policy during these years. As Paul Stronski has described, Soviet wartime propaganda in Uzbekistan sought to link the local population's desire to protect Uzbek land, traditions, and culture to the protection of the

¹²⁵ TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 5, 93-94.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹²⁷ TsGA KR F. 1403, Op.1, d. 19, 7-9.

Soviet Union as a whole, including the regions of Russia then under Nazi occupation. This was accomplished by presenting the Soviet state not only as compatible with, but even as the primary defender of Central Asian traditions. Propaganda during these years, according to Stronski, unapologetically “glorified and defended Central Asian cities’ pre-Soviet traits” and graphically described the enslavement of the population and destruction of Central Asian historical monuments and art that would come to pass if the Nazis reached the region.¹²⁸ The revitalization of artistic crafts-producing institutions in Central Asia thus may have been designed to serve as a concrete, if token, demonstration of the Soviet state’s role as defender of Central Asian cultures and traditions against Nazi depredations. The first report issued by the newly established Uzkhudozhpromsoiuz in early 1944 reiterated the glowing rhetoric on national cultures that had taken root in the mid-1930s, but also tied the importance of fostering national goods production to the wartime situation:

The military successes of the Red Army around the entire country have provoked an unprecedented enthusiasm for labor and created the conditions for the broad development of the creative capabilities of the people [*narodnyi mass*]. The party and government have always shown exceptional concern for the preservation and development of the national cultures of the peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union. Special attention is paid to the development of folk artistic crafts, where the people’s talent [*narodnyi talant*] is most broadly expressed.¹²⁹

The state’s willingness to invest in and materially support Central Asian folk crafts as a part of its wartime propaganda measures reinforces the interpretation that national goods were increasingly conceptualized as a component of Soviet nationalities policy and its guarantees to non-Russian populations by the 1940s.

Following the wartime restoration and reconstruction of Central Asian crafts production, a second, more far-reaching and multifaceted, challenge to the state’s national goods policy would arrive during the Khrushchev era (1953-1964). In the absence of any concrete statement of policy calling for

¹²⁸ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 78-79.

¹²⁹ TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 5, 56.

the curtailment of the production of Central Asian-style goods, it is not immediately obvious why this was the case. The Khrushchev era did, it is true, witness a shift in official rhetoric away from the confident promotion of ethno-cultural difference that had characterized the Stalin era and toward a more ambivalent position, as will be explored in Chapter 2. Questions about the relationship between national distinctiveness and “internationalism,” between the preservation of pre-revolutionary heritage and the eventual “fusion” of Soviet peoples (*sliianie*), between traditional material cultures and modernization – all previously held in check by verbatim repetition of Stalinist formulas – now bubbled up into earnest debates.¹³⁰ Simultaneously, whereas Central Asian styles that relied on heavy textiles, rich embroidery, and gold stitching had proven broadly compatible with the baroque luxury favored in the consumer culture of the late Stalin era, the new “Khrushchev Modern” aesthetic of clean lines and minimal adornment in interior design led to doubts about the contemporary relevance and “tastefulness” of these traditional styles.¹³¹ Yet while advocates for the preservation of traditional-style Central Asian art and material culture in lost some ground during this period, this new ambivalence at the rhetorical level, playing out largely in debates among artistic experts, does not seem to have manifested in a deliberate policy shift away from national goods production. The closest Moscow seems to have come to such a policy was a 1955 decree of the Central Committee and Council of Ministers of the USSR that condemned architects who mechanically carried “the forms of medieval Eastern architecture” into contemporary construction.¹³² Although neither “folk artistic crafts” nor national goods more broadly were mentioned in this decree, local decision-makers may have interpreted this as

¹³⁰ See Chapter 2.

¹³¹ The phrase “Khrushchev modern” is borrowed from Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 227-268. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this shift.

¹³² This decree is referenced in relation to broader questions of Central Asian artistic traditions in “Diskussia dolzhna prodolzhat’sia!,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 10 (Oct. 1963): 11.

a signal of shifting official priorities and generalized its meaning to include a discouragement of traditional styles in consumer goods production as well.

Far from orders from above to curtail national goods production, however, the Khrushchev era saw a continuation of the earlier pattern of repeated demands within republic-level governmental and economic institutions to further develop folk artistic crafts. Significantly, this included a newly heightened emphasis on production of such goods for mass consumption by Central Asian consumers. A 1956 resolution on consumer goods production from the Kyrgyz Council of Ministers called for an expansion in the quantity and assortment of national clothing and artistic goods produced within the republic, including a list of traditional-style goods to be produced within each ministry: for the Ministry of Light Industry, Kyrgyz national dresses, women's traditional jackets (Kyrg. *kemsel*), vests (Kyrg. *chypama*), and men's quilted robes (Kyrg. *chepken*); for the Ministry of Local Industry, lined tunics (Kyrg. *besmant*) and men's national headwear (Kyrg. *kalpak*); and for the Producers' Cooperative, embroidered *tush-kiyiz*, felt *shyrdaks*, and Kyrgyz national chests.¹³³ When measures such as these failed to produce the desired results, representatives of trade organizations issued a steady stream of complaints claiming that state enterprises were neglecting the "material and cultural needs" of the local population. "Take national dishware, like *piyolas*," a shop director protested at a 1963 conference in Kyrgyzstan, "there are none at all in Tiupskii raion and you won't find them."¹³⁴ In Uzbekistan, a representative from Samarkand pointed out the "lack within the trade network of necessary goods, like cotton and silk fabrics with national patterns" and connected this with popular morale: "All of this has an influence on the mood of rural consumers, and justified discontent arises among them."¹³⁵ Such unfulfilled state decrees and unheeded institutional complaints are the characteristic symptoms of a

¹³³ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 5, d. 260, 117.

¹³⁴ TsGA KR F. 573, Op. 6, d. 552, 136.

¹³⁵ TsGA RUz F. 217, Op. 10, d. 84, 147.

“soft-line” policy that had not been abandoned, much less openly repudiated, but merely sidelined, suffering from diminished urgency and a compromised institutional support system and ending up lost in the sea of competing demands from above.¹³⁶

To a large extent, then, the difficulties with national goods production during this period appear to have been less a result of specific policy intentions than of the administrative and institutional reshuffling that accompanied Khrushchev’s Sovnarkhoz reform (1957-1965) and the simultaneous merging of the Producers’ Cooperative artels into state industry. Between 1956 and 1959, the Uzbek and Kyrgyz Producers’ Cooperatives began to be dismantled, with the enterprises they had formerly overseen passed either to the republic-level Ministries of Local Industry or to ministries under the authority of the regional Sovnarkhozes. Representatives of the cooperatives initially greeted the announcement of this reorganization with enthusiasm, as a vindication of the artels’ technological and productive achievements and a guarantee that they would now be supplied with raw materials and resources on par with other full-fledged enterprises of “state industry.”¹³⁷ Even as late as 1963, an article on Uzbek cloth production hailed the upcoming transfer of a number of textile enterprises specifically producing “national fabrics” to the authority of the Sovnarkhoz, arguing that this would allow for increased production as such enterprises were “strengthened and reconstructed,” using the new influx of funding to transition from by-hand to mechanized production methods.¹³⁸ By the time the Sovnarkhozes were dismantled in 1965, however, it had become clear in retrospect that this new organizational system had ended up diminishing national goods production. “From the time of the transfer of these enterprises to the authority of the Sovnarkhoz,” a letter from the Uzbek consumer’s union to Gosplan explained, the locally-specific consumer goods that had earlier been manufactured by

¹³⁶ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 21-22.

¹³⁷ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 4, d. 215, 41; d. 216, 1-2.

¹³⁸ S. Makhkamova, “Uzbekskie tkani segodnia,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1963): 34.

the producers' cooperative "were either liquidated altogether, or the output of these products was curtailed to a significant degree."¹³⁹ This included silk national dresses for women and girls, with consumer demand now fulfilled at 50% or less. During the same period, according to an article in *Pravda Vostoka*, artistic crafts in general declined in the hands of the "negligent proprietors" of the Sovnarkhoz, and "the production of carpets in the artistic factories of [the Uzbek cities of] Samarkand, Qarshi, and Andijan was shut down as unprofitable."¹⁴⁰ Even the production of less ornate and decorative local goods like the *ketmon* (a Central Asian type of hoe used for agricultural work) and *qumg'on* (a metal kettle or pitcher) suffered during this period. "Willingly or unwillingly," a 1964 report of the Uzbek Consumer's Union complained, "the Sovnarkhoz has turned [the *ketmon*] into a deficit good," with the ideologically offensive result that "laborers are forced to buy them from private traders at speculative prices."¹⁴¹ This last statement suggests that unsanctioned artisanal production of such goods and their sale at local bazaars persisted, perhaps allowing them to remain a feature of Central Asian daily life in spite of curtailed production within state institutions.

Somewhat counterintuitively, then, the Sovnarkhoz reform, later blamed for encouraging harmful manifestations of "localism" (*mestnichestvo*) and prioritizing regional needs over all-union ones, resulted not in an increase in the state production of Central Asian national goods, but instead a noticeable decline.¹⁴² The reasons for this appear to be twofold. First, the redistribution of artistic crafts enterprises among various institutions under the umbrella of the Sovnarkhoz meant that they were no longer concentrated within a single organization with a special mandate to produce such crafts, instead being dispersed among various parent organizations with their own planning priorities. The

¹³⁹ TsGA RUz F. 217, Op. 10, d. 388, 138.

¹⁴⁰ M. Skorovarova, "Skuchaiut ruki masterov," 11 Apr. 1967, 3.

¹⁴¹ TsGA RUz F. 217, Op. 10, d. 388, 204.

¹⁴² On localism and the Sovnarkhoz reform, see Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 360.

Uzbek and Kyrgyz producers' cooperatives, it is true, had never been the sole producers of national goods within their republics; some types of national goods, particularly clothing and dishware, were mass-produced alongside so-called "European" goods in state factories, and a handful of specialized workshops under the authority of various cultural and artistic institutions were engaged in small-scale production of embroideries, textile goods, wood carvings, and so on.¹⁴³ But until the late 1950s, the producers' cooperatives had remained the economic institutions with the most specific mandate for the production of national goods, as well as the institutional experience, specialized tools, and production workflows necessary for artisanal handwork. As a result, many enterprises formerly dedicated to producing predominantly national goods underwent "de-specialization" when they were transferred to other industrial ministries under the Sovnarkhoz.¹⁴⁴ Under their new institutional leadership, they shifted their attention to the Khrushchev-era state's particular priorities of the moment – for instance, the production of children's clothing, sporting goods, and furniture for state institutions like schools and theaters – which drew focus and resources away from the production of specifically national-style goods.¹⁴⁵

A second and closely related problem is that with the loss of the institutional home of the Producers' Cooperative, enterprises producing national goods were now subject to the system of "planning by gross output [*planirovanie po valu*]," which starkly prioritized quantitative production and eliminated the special dispensation for slow, labor-intensive, and costly production methods that Central Asian folk crafts had enjoyed during the Stalin era. It should be noted that folk crafts were experiencing the same struggles everywhere in the Soviet Union at this time. A roundtable discussion

¹⁴³ Uzbek women's "national dresses," for example, had been mass-produced within the republic's Ministry of Light Industry for decades. See, for example, TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 18, d. 48, 122-123; TsGa RUz F. 837, Op. 33, d. 6057, 62-64.

¹⁴⁴ The term "de-specialization" is used to describe this process in A. Abdurakhmanov, "Iz mestnogo syr'ia, svoimi silami, dlia mestnogo potrebleniia," *Ekonomika i zhizn'* [Tashkent] No. 9 (Sep. 1966): 15.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, TsGA RUz F. 2340, Op. 1, d. 26, 4.

hosted by the decorative arts journal *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* in 1963 aired numerous complaints to this effect, with a representative of Ukrainian local industry arguing that “the pressure of the ‘gross’ [va/]... does not allow us the possibility of engaging with artistic questions as we should. The plan should consider the amount of time that is necessary for creative work, and [financial] allocations must be made for it [*na nee dolzhny byt’ otpushcheny assignovaniia*].”¹⁴⁶

Still, not all national goods production dried up during this period as a consequence of the elimination of the Producers’ Cooperative and the transfer of enterprises to the authority of the Sovnarkhoz. Most startlingly, the Tashkent ceramics factory was able to maintain a yearly production plan of 629,000 *piyolas* and 669,500 *kosas* (Uzbek-style bowls) in 1960, constituting the bulk of the factory’s total planned output of 1.52 million pieces of ceramic dishware for that year.¹⁴⁷ But this is, in a sense, the exception that proves the rule; these were national goods defined by culturally distinctive but relatively simple and easily reproducible shapes, not depending on elaborate ornamentation, specialized materials, or skilled labor by hand, and thus not sharply disincentivized by planning metrics emphasizing production volume. The upshot is that the years of the Khrushchev era and the Sovnarkhoz reform, generally discussed retrospectively in Soviet sources as the low ebb of national goods production after its advent in the 1920s, nevertheless witnessed neither a complete curtailment of the production of Central Asian-style goods nor the principled rejection of their mass production under state auspices.

“Restoration” from above: The reaffirmation and renaissance of national goods production, 1966-1975

The setbacks of the Khrushchev era, though never entirely stamping out national goods production, were nevertheless significant enough that by 1968 a number of voices – artistic specialists,

¹⁴⁶ “Tvorcheski rukovodit’ khudozhestvennymi promyslami: soveshchanie redaktsii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* No. 1 (Jan. 1963): 38.

¹⁴⁷ TsGA RUz F. 2340, Op. 1, d. 26, 229.

representatives of trade organizations, state officials, and others – began to express concerns about the future of local artisanal crafts and to call for their “restoration.” “If urgent measures are not taken,” a 1967 *Pravda Vostoka* editorial warned, “the old masters will pass away and traditional types of applied art will disappear forever.”¹⁴⁸ This alarmist language was not exactly new; the notion that folk crafts needed to be “rescued” or “restored” by direct state intervention was common from the very earliest days of Soviet rule, based on the premise that various forces since the turn of the century – nascent industrialization in Russia and “cultural decline” in Central Asia – endangered traditions of artisanal craftsmanship.¹⁴⁹ But this time, the decline and possible extinction of traditional forms of folk art could not be blamed on late imperial upheavals, and were instead directly linked to the “negligent” policies of the post-war Soviet state. In the context of the broader Brezhnev-era renewal of interest in pre-revolutionary traditions and national identities, discussed further in Chapter 2, the insistent cries from the artistic community found a receptive audience in all-union decision-making bodies, which instituted pivotal measures for the restoration and development of artistic crafts throughout the Soviet Union. In contrast to many earlier state measures, this new set of decrees, most significantly the one issued by the USSR Council of Ministers on August 14, 1968, titled “On measures for the further development of folk artistic crafts,” did not only exhort lower-standing organizations to study, develop, and organize artistic crafts production, but offered financial and institutional support for this purpose, in essence creating the infrastructure that would buttress artistic crafts production in Central Asia through the end of the Soviet period and even beyond.

While pressures from professional artistic circles both in Russia and in the non-Russian republics seem to have helped bring the issue of folk crafts to the forefront of official attention, this was a moment at which initiatives from Moscow proved crucial. Measures that had been introduced in 1966,

¹⁴⁸ M. Skorovarova, “Skuchaiut ruki masterov,” *Pravda Vostoka*, 11 Apr. 1967, 3.

¹⁴⁹ S. Khmel’nitskii, “Sud’ba natsional’nogo stilia v Srednei Azii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 3 (Mar. 1963): 23.

responding to the call of the 23rd party congress earlier that year to increase the volume, quality, and assortment of folk handicrafts throughout the Soviet Union, were plagued with the same problems of implementation that had hindered such exhortations since the end of the Second World War, and were greeted with the obligatory series of hand-wringing reports describing the lack of resources and organizational capacity to put them into practice.¹⁵⁰ The turning point instead came in November of 1967, when the Soviet of Nationalities wrote to the chairman of the USSR's Council of Ministers, A.N. Kosygin, to direct his attention to the problem of "the development of artistic crafts in the union republics." The language of the report demonstrates the durability of Soviet discourse on folk crafts production as it had been established during the mid-1930s. "Folk artistic crafts in our country represent the most valuable treasure-house of Soviet multinational culture and art," it stated. "They exert an enormous influence on the aesthetic education of the people and the formation of good taste and cultured habits."¹⁵¹ Two of the most important Stalin-era justifications for the state-sponsored production of folk crafts – their function as an expression of national distinctiveness, and their ability to elevate the masses as a populist form of art – retained their foundational position in official rhetoric even a decade and a half after Stalin's death. A few days after receiving this report, the Council of Ministers instructed the governments of each union republic to submit proposals to Moscow for the development of their local varieties of folk artistic crafts.¹⁵² These proposals, in combination with inputs from a variety of cultural institutions like the Ministry of Culture and Union of Artists, eventually formed the basis for the pivotal August 1968 decree.

The intensified central interest in and scrutiny of folk crafts production in the various union republics make the 1967-68 years a rare opportunity when comprehensive data is available on crafts

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, RGAE F. 4273, Op. 66, d. 2786, 5-7; TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 20, 88.

¹⁵¹ RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66, d. 2786, 5.

¹⁵² RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66, d. 2786, 2.

production in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz SSRs simultaneously. Comparing the two confirms not only the much smaller scope of artistic crafts production in Kyrgyzstan than in Uzbekistan prior to the 1968 decree, but also its tendency to be scattered as a minor function across a number of different institutions. If the Kyrgyz SSR's production plan for artistic crafts in 1968 totaled around 2 million rubles, in the Uzbek SSR it was more than ten times as high, at 25.7 million rubles.¹⁵³ Moreover, whereas artistic crafts production in the Uzbek SSR took place entirely under the auspices of the Ministry of Local Industry by 1968,¹⁵⁴ in the Kyrgyz SSR it was split rather haphazardly among a number of other industrial and cultural institutions: the Ministry of Consumer Services (*Ministerstvo Bytovogo Obsluzhivaniia*) produced national-style painted fabrics, the Theater Society engaged in carpet-weaving and wood-working, and the Artistic Fund produced traditional-style *chiy* mats and *shyrdaks* (the last typically in very small quantities). When the all-union Council of Ministers requested proposals from the republics on the development of crafts production in 1967, the Kyrgyz republican authorities responded with the flat statement, "There are no specialized enterprises or workshops for the production of artistic items in the republic."¹⁵⁵ On the one hand, this discrepancy in Uzbek and Kyrgyz production can be attributed to the more devastating effect in Kyrgyzstan of the 1959 liquidation of the Producers' Cooperative, which had previously constituted the lone institution in the republic accommodating specialized artisanal handicraft industries. On the other hand, this fact in itself hints at a more fundamental difference between the two republics: in Uzbekistan, national goods production seems to have been consistently pursued within republic-level and local organizations throughout the post-war decades even in the absence of explicit pressure from above, whereas in Kyrgyzstan, it tended to remain more marginal and

¹⁵³ For the Kyrgyz plan, see RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66, d. 2786, 192-193; for the Uzbek plan see *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ It should be noted that "artistic crafts" is used in the official Soviet sense here, and thus excludes the production of other types of "national goods," such as Uzbek-style clothing, which continued to be produced in the Ministry of Light Industry during this period.

¹⁵⁵ RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66, d. 2786, 188.

dependent on external pressures. The reasons for this were probably multiple. Uzbekistan's historically more commercialized and developed crafts production industries had long attracted greater interest and advocacy from Soviet artistic experts than had Kyrgyzstan's. Likely important, too, was the proportionally larger population of titular nationals in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵⁶ Whatever the case, the 1968 decree, like the push for union-wide crafts development between 1936 and 1940, demonstrates that while quantitative production outcomes varied from republic to republic, the policy of promoting such national-style production was expressly intended to be universal within the USSR, and was pursued as a matter of principle even in the absence of local eagerness or capacity to follow through on it.

This is not to say that there was no effort to correct for republic-level deficiencies. The 1967 Soviet of Nationalities report had noted that the continuing shortcomings in crafts production derived, in part, from the fact that "in the republics, a unified administration for folk artistic crafts and for the artistic and creative work of folk master craftsmen is lacking."¹⁵⁷ The August 14, 1968 decree thus called for the establishment of specialized enterprises for the production of national handicrafts within the republics and their consolidation under a single administration possessing both a clear mandate and the necessary resources for developing folk crafts. In Kyrgyzstan, the creation of a specialized Association of Folk Artistic Crafts under the Ministry of Local Industry in the wake of the 1968 decree constituted a transformative moment for local crafts production under Soviet auspices.¹⁵⁸ The conditions of work during the organization's first year of operation were not exactly impressive; as a report from June of 1969 describes, "The Association of Folk Artistic crafts is organized in the first floor of a residential

¹⁵⁶ According to the 1959 Soviet census, ethnic Uzbeks constituted 62.1% of the population of the Uzbek SSR, as opposed to 40.5% for ethnic Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan. In 1970, the numbers remained similar – 65.5% titular nationals for Uzbekistan and 43.8% for Kyrgyzstan. Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, t. IV (Moscow: "Statistika," 1973), 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66, d. 2786, 7.

¹⁵⁸ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 29, 107.

house... The Association has almost no equipment (with the exception of sewing machines and small metal-working and wood-working machines). Work is mainly carried out by hand by folk masters and tradesmen.”¹⁵⁹ But over the course of the 1970s, the Association (in later years known as the Kyial Union) became the locus of the production of Kyrgyz-style goods in their capacity both as local consumer goods and as souvenirs: *kalpaks*, traditionally ornamented horsecloths [Kyrg. *at zhabuu*], women’s handbags woven from reeds decorated with dyed wool [Kyrg. *chiy*], chess sets with pieces carved to resemble the heroes of the Kyrgyz epic poem “Manas,” and so on (Figure 1.7).¹⁶⁰ The Kyial Union in fact ended up outlasting the Soviet Union itself, and has remained a producer of Kyrgyz handicrafts in the post-Soviet period.¹⁶¹ A similar, if less dramatic, reorganization occurred in Uzbekistan as well, as artistic crafts-producing enterprises were newly concentrated under a single administration within the Ministry of Local Industry.¹⁶² By 1974, the Uzbek Association of Folk Artistic Crafts incorporated 10 enterprises throughout the republic, many of which had grown into full-scale factories; by 1979, these enterprises were putting out millions of locally-specific objects a year, including more than a dozen varieties of embroidered and gold-stitched *do’ppi*, five varieties of *so’zana*, and numerous designs of ceramic tea bowls (Uzb. *kosa*) and serving platters (Uzb. *lagan*).¹⁶³

The 1968 all-union decree additionally offered a resolution to another organizational question that had troubled Soviet artistic crafts production since its inception: how to reconcile mass production

¹⁵⁹ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 64, 42-43.

¹⁶⁰ L. Moldakhmatova, “Uzdar menen zholugushuu,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 1 (Jan. 1971): 21-23; N. Koroleva, “Slet narodnykh masterov Kirgizii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 3 (Mar. 1973): 51.

¹⁶¹ In 1994, in the midst of Kyrgyzstan’s transition to a market economy, there was evidently talk of turning Kyial into a joint-stock company; however, members of the organization successfully petitioned to instead be transferred to the authority of the newly-formed “Union of Folk Masters,” where they remained formally a state enterprise. A. Iu. Mal’chik, “Ob”edinenie ‘Kyial’ v period sotsial’no-politicheskikh preobrazovaniy serediny 1980-1990x gg.,” *Vestnik Natsional’noi akademii nauk Respubliki Kazakhstan* v. 3 (2006): 50-53.

¹⁶² This transition had in fact already begun following the earlier 1966 measures, but the organization was reformulated and renamed to the Main Administration of Folk Artistic Crafts following the 1968 decree.

¹⁶³ TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 777, 110-111; TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 1202, 38, 58, 19-101, 117.



Figure 1.7. Production of Kyrgyz *kalpaks* in the “Kyial” Union of folk artistic crafts. Source: S. Balbakova, “Bashky maksatybyz – sapattuuluk,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 7 (Jul. 1978): 5.

with the traditional by-hand methods of folk craftsmanship. During the early years of the artelization of Central Asian crafts and their integration into Producers’ Cooperatives, Soviet specialists had frequently fretted about the low levels of mechanization of folk crafts industries and their continued reliance on “primitive artisanal methods,” which were assumed to be undesirable both from the perspective of efficiency and for ideological reasons.¹⁶⁴ Under Khrushchev, the 1959 integration of the artisanal cooperatives into state industry was hailed by one representative of the Kyrgyz Producers’ Cooperative as the victory of machine over hand production: “We are no longer cooperativized handicraftsmen... We live now in a completely different time and in a state in which a technological revolution is truly taking place.”¹⁶⁵ Of course, these statements represented aspirations more than realities. Handwork

¹⁶⁴ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 19, 6, 168; d. 32, 40

¹⁶⁵ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 4, d. 215, 41.

continued to constitute a major element folk crafts production in Central Asia through the 1960s, and even “mechanization” could just be an extravagant way of describing work performed with the help of a sewing machine.¹⁶⁶ Yet more tellingly, in parallel with narratives about the triumph of technology, some advocates of folk crafts were already imagining a separate and potentially permanent sphere for low-tech handicraft work in these artistic trades. The preference for work by hand tended to be especially strong in regard to items intended for foreign export, where concerns of quality and “authenticity” were paramount, but this was far from the sole concern. A 1954 Soviet work on Uzbek decorative crafts had theorized that the development of Central Asian folk art under socialism “proceeds not along the line of change in the technological basis, but rather along the line of artistic and ideological enrichment,” and had suggested that it was neither likely nor desirable for embroidery by hand to be replaced entirely by machine embroidery under Soviet leadership.¹⁶⁷ By the onset of the Brezhnev era, as will be seen in Chapter 2, many artistic professionals had begun to openly and passionately push back against mechanization in folk crafts production, viewing it as an affront to the authenticity, uniqueness, and emotional intimacy of traditional hand-crafted objects.

The solution eventually offered in the 1968 all-union decree, both responding to these debates and setting the tone for discussions in subsequent years, approached the problem of balancing mechanization and handwork from two directions. First, in certain trades like Uzbek embroidery, separate production plans would be issued for items produced by hand and for those produced by machine.¹⁶⁸ Hand-made crafts would retain the benefits of uniqueness and authenticity characteristic of true “folk crafts,” the reasoning went, while machine-produced crafts would fill the role of large-scale

¹⁶⁶ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 19, 2, 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 11.

¹⁶⁸ See the yearly plans of the Uzbek SSR's Association of Folk Artistic Crafts, e.g. TsGA RUz F. 2771, Op. 1, d. 2, 3-5, 31-36; d. 160, 25-45.

production for the mass consumer. Second, for goods to be produced primarily by hand, the goal was to mechanize the parts of the production process that were not directly connected with the creative process or the artistic adornment of the item. In the following years, this distinction between the artistic and non-artistic facets of production would become accepted as the ideal among many Soviet advocates of artistic handicrafts. It was reiterated by the secretary of the Union of Artists of the USSR at a conference on the development of folk art in 1977: “It is necessary to mechanize, and as broadly as possible, only preparatory, auxiliary, and some technical operations of work... We must not under any circumstances encroach on the creative process of the master – this is fatal for folk art.”¹⁶⁹ On the one hand, then, the 1968 all-union decree, like the republic-level decrees in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz SSRs that followed it, called for supplying crafts workshops with “non-standardized tools, equipment, and instruments for the mechanization of auxiliary processes in the production of folk artistic crafts.” On the other hand, the decree also called for new planning methods designed to accommodate the high proportion of hand-work and frequent changes of pattern required for the production of a broad variety of artistic crafts.¹⁷⁰ From this perspective, 1968 represented a pivotal moment, establishing a rhetorically affirmed and institutionally supported space for artisanal handwork within the post-war Soviet economy. In the sphere of folk crafts production, hand-craftsmanship was no longer viewed merely as a temporary economic necessity nor as a concession to the Orientalist tastes of Western collectors. It was, like the production of national-style goods itself, enshrined as a protected set of local skills and traditions and reframed as a state investment in Central Asian cultural preservation (Figure 1.8).

Aftermath of the 1968 decree. Unsurprisingly, the policies adopted in 1968 did not resolve all of the problems facing folk crafts production in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan’s Minister of Local Industry

¹⁶⁹ *Stenogramma Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po problemam razvitiia sovremennogo narodnogo iskusstva v svete postanovleniia TsK KPSS “O narodnykh khudozhestvennykh promyslakh”* (Moscow: 1977), 11.

¹⁷⁰ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 20, 166; TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 41, d. 1111, 151.



Figure 1.8. Mass production and artisanal craftsmanship. Caption: "The *do'ppis* sewn by Marhabo Muxtorova, a Komsomol member and one of the leading workers of the 'Women's Labor' factory in Samarkand, are admired by all. With her good, high-quality work, Marhabo Muxtorova has overfulfilled her monthly plan by 130%." Source: Photo by A. Kuz'menko, *Sodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1968).

observed in March of 1969 that the newly formed Association of Folk Artistic Crafts “does not have experience in the organization of folk artistic crafts and needs to study the organization of leading, experienced trades.” He requested funds to send representatives of the association on a research trip to study artistic crafts organizations in Poland, which had been the subject of a glowing article in *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* earlier that year.¹⁷¹ In spite of the 1968 decree’s commitment to supporting handwork in artistic trades, a 1970 report from the Uzbek Ministry of Local Industry continued to complain about impediments created by the standardized labor norms and pay rates set by Gosplan, which failed to take into account “the specificities of these enterprises, in which the assortment of produced goods frequently changes and the basic technological processes are carried out by hand (gold-stitched items, hand-embroidered skull caps and so on) and cannot be mechanized.” “Such a system of planning indicators for labor,” the report concluded, “leads to simplification and monotony in the assortment and a lowering of the artistic level of produced goods.”¹⁷² In response to concerns like these arising from all corners of the Soviet Union, an additional all-union decree “On folk artistic crafts” was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in February of 1975. Beyond noting that the 1968 measures had so far been “implemented slowly” and reaffirming the center’s commitment to their fulfillment, the 1975 decree specifically sought to address issues of labor and pay rates of the kind raised by Uzbek local industry, as well as calling for an increased attention to the creation of objects of a “high artistic level,” rather than pushing only for quantitative growth in folk crafts production.¹⁷³

In fact, tensions between quantitative and qualitative concerns, between the demands of economics and the demands of aesthetics in the manufacture of folk crafts, only intensified after 1968. Many artists and representatives of cultural institutions had hoped that the 1968 decree would

¹⁷¹ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, 106, 9.

¹⁷² TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 405, 174.

¹⁷³ “V tsentral’nom komitete KPSS,” *Pravda*, 27 Feb. 1975, 1.

represent an opportunity for a comprehensive change in the Soviet approach to the production of folk crafts, moving them out of the orbit of economic institutions and into the hands of artistic experts. In the months leading up to the decree, the all-union Ministry of Culture and Union of Artists had lobbied passionately for the complete transfer of the oversight of crafts production from economic institutions, such as the republican Ministries of Local Industry, to an “All-Union Artistic-Methodological Council on folk art and artistic crafts.”¹⁷⁴ In essence, they advocated elevating professional artistic authority over industrial authority in this realm, even suggesting that economic concerns like efficiency and output should be sidelined entirely in favor of a focus on artistic quality. When a draft of the upcoming decree was released for comment and revision in March of 1968, a group of fifteen Soviet folk artists, art historians, writers, and ethnographers sent a petition to A.N. Kosygin decrying the draft’s exclusive attention to “questions of a purely economic character” that prioritized the quantitative output of goods over artistic concerns. Tellingly, though, their disdain extended not only to economic institutions’ preoccupation with “gross output,” but also to the pressure to fulfill local consumer demand: “Year by year the plan is increased, and the intensification of labor and race for fulfillment of the plan by gross output, fatal to art, expands... The master is being transformed into a creative employee and the true artist into a provider of bad consumer goods.”¹⁷⁵ Their position ultimately did not prevail either in 1968 or in 1975, and folk crafts production remained the province of economic institutions (albeit with advisory “Artistic Councils” staffed by artistic professionals, who continued to complain vociferously about the aesthetic quality of produced goods) through the end of the Soviet period. But competitions for authority between artistic experts and economic institutions, accompanied by a new set of debates about the role of traditional-style handicrafts – whether as unique objects of art or as widely accessible

¹⁷⁴ RGAE F. 4372, Op. 66 d. 2787, 57.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

consumer commodities – provided new ground for debates about the relationship between Soviet belonging and nationality in the 1970s.¹⁷⁶

In Central Asia, the outcomes of the 1966-1975 initiatives for the revitalization of folk crafts can be evaluated both in terms of their concrete impact on production and in terms of their more intangible effects on Soviet attitudes and discourse. From the standpoint of quantitative production, the outcome in Kyrgyzstan differed fairly dramatically from that in Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the situation seems to have more closely matched the official rhetoric of “rescuing” traditions of artisanal craftsmanship from extinction, with the establishment of the Kyial Union providing an institutional shelter for small-scale commercial production of crafts that were otherwise being crowded out of the increasingly industrialized Soviet economy. The expansion of Kyial after its uncertain early days in 1969 was considerable; by 1973, it had established branches in Osh, Issyk-Köl raion, and Özgön raion in addition to its initial base in the capital city of Frunze.¹⁷⁷ In the same year, in addition to small-scale production of *shyrdaks*, *tush-kiyiz*, and other traditional-style items, it was boasting a production rate of 3,500 *kalpaks* in a single month (which would total 42,000 for the year if the trend held).¹⁷⁸ If in 1959 Kyrgyz representatives had lamented the “very offensive” fact that the republic was unable to turn over any high-quality local artistic crafts for the international exhibition in Brussels, by 1970 the Kyrgyz SSR was planning to send “a large quantity of sample objects (30-40 varieties)” to an international expo in Japan accompanied by two employees of local industry.¹⁷⁹ For an all-union Soviet exhibition during the same year, Kyrgyzstan’s enterprises submitted, among other things, ten types of ceramic goods “manufactured with national themes,” a *shyrdak*, a *kalpak*, a traditional Kyrgyz stringed instrument

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ Zhamila Kochkorbaeva, “Kyial Tolkuit,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 1 (Jan. 1973): 11.

¹⁷⁸ K. Zhumagulova, “Kyrgyz kalpaci,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1973).

¹⁷⁹ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 4, d. 215, 44; TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 106, 194.

(*komuz*), samples of “national silk fabrics,” a woven reed and wool decorative mat (*chiy*), and national bracelets and rings.¹⁸⁰ These developments were, to be sure, not negligible, but they pale in comparison to the output of the Uzbek folk crafts association, which by 1972 was producing over 1.4 million *do’ppis*, 126,000 *so’zanas*, and 750,000 *kosas* in a year.¹⁸¹ Rather than providing a protected niche for the production and circulation of Central Asian-style objects as in Kyrgyzstan, in Uzbekistan the policies of the Brezhnev era instead served to bolster and exponentially expand a sector of the local economy that had already begun to thrive in the late Stalin era and had remained robust in spite of the temporary setbacks it suffered under Khrushchev.

A somewhat murkier question is the effect of the 1966-75 state measures on the production and availability of other national-style goods that were not included under the rubric of “artistic crafts” in Soviet rhetoric and policy. While the 1968 institutional reorganization created unified associations for specialized and labor-intensive trades like embroidery, wood-carving, leather-working, ceramic-painting, and so on, it said nothing about the production of Central Asian-style goods requiring less specialized tools and patterns, which had become a normalized part of the output of some of the region’s factories during the preceding decades. This second sub-category of national goods included certain types of national clothing, furniture, and dishware, usually simpler in form and less adorned than what was being produced under the banner of “folk artistic crafts.” This oversight in the 1968 policy may be explained by the fact that all-union decrees tended to be grounded in the experience of the RSFSR, which had its “folk artistic crafts” in Palekh and Khokhloma but lacked any real analogue to Central Asia’s “national goods.” But in spite of this lack of attention from Moscow, the 1966-75 decrees appear to have been interpreted in Central Asia as authorizing a broader expansion of national goods production even beyond the specifically ordered development of folk crafts enterprises. After 1968, for instance,

¹⁸⁰ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 106, 96-97.

¹⁸¹ TsGA RUz F. 2771, Op. 1, d. 160, 25-45.

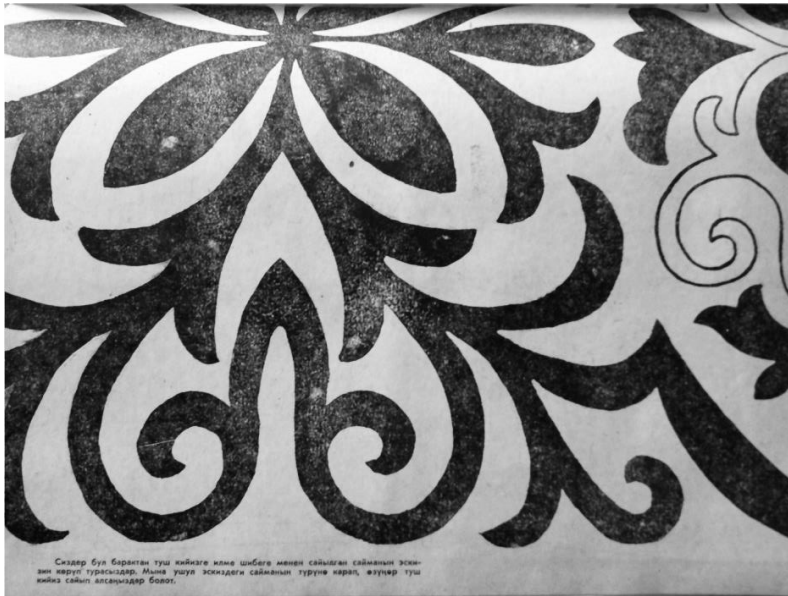
Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Local Industry planned to increase its yearly production of "national women's boots" from 300,500 to 400,000, various kinds of "national *ichigi*" (soft-sided leather boots) from a total of 27,600 to 80,000, and specialized aluminum steamers (Kyrg. *kaskan*) for preparing traditional Kyrgyz *manty* from 4,780 to 30,000 by 1970.¹⁸² In Uzbekistan, while the total number of women's dresses delivered by Uztorgodezhdy to retail centers of trade increased by 153% from 1965 to 1970 (from 1.2 million to 1.8 million), the number of dresses of the "national assortment" increased by just over 500% in the same period (from 104,000 to 523,000).¹⁸³ A 1971 report by the Uzbek Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand recommended that orders for "the national assortment" of women's sewn goods should be increased from the 1970 figure of 37.7% of total orders for women's sewn goods to a full 51.6% by 1975 – proposing, in other words, that just over half of the women's clothing produced for Uzbek consumers should be national.¹⁸⁴

Beyond the question of quantities, however, a second and arguably equally powerful consequence of the Brezhnev era's policies for revitalizing folk crafts lay in the rhetorical realm – the ascendancy of a pervasive discourse in the Soviet Central Asian press celebrating national design, revering traditional methods of craftsmanship, and advertising national-style goods to Central Asian consumers. Here, the divide between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz SSRs was less pronounced; both republics saw a surge in the public profile of traditional-style crafts after 1968, with women's journals, in particular, becoming filled with effusive articles and photo essays depicting traditional crafts and their manner of production and urging their consumption within Central Asian homes. Even apart from their praise for the state's newly-formed folk crafts associations, these journals also increasingly published templates for readers to use to sew their own *shyrdaks*, *so'zanas*, *do'ppis*, and so on (Figure 1.9). In a

¹⁸² TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 64, 136-142.

¹⁸³ TsGA RUz F. 2750, Op. 1N, d. 13, 65.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.



Сиздер бул барганга туш кийизге кеме шибеге менен сайыган сайманын эскиз-ини керектурсыздар. Мына ушул эскиздеги сайманын түрүнө карап, жүзүңөр туш кийиз сайып аласыздар белек.



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6-СОНИГА БЕПУЛ ИЛОВА

ЯНГИ НУСХА
ДЎППИЛАР

Figure 1.9. Templates for the home creation of traditional-style handicrafts, published for readers in Soviet Central Asian women’s journals.

Above: A pattern recommended for the home embroidery of a Kyrgyz *tush-kiyiz*. Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 2 (Feb. 1978).

Below: A pattern for a “new design of *do’ppi*,” with embroidery instructions included. Source: “Yangi nusxa do’ppilar,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 6 (Jun. 1961).

sense, this represented the culmination of the Soviet policy of national goods production as it had played out in the region since the 1930s. More than just placing traditional-style goods on the shelves of Soviet shops and cooperatives, this policy created an explicitly legitimated space for Central Asian material culture, for the transmission of the aesthetic principles of traditional design and hand-craftsmanship, and for the lasting embodiment of ethnic distinctiveness in the realms of art and daily life alike.

Conclusion

By the last years of the Stalin era, the policy of producing Central Asian-style goods and “folk artistic crafts” under Soviet auspices had not merely solidified into a stable status quo, but had found such a combination of economic, ideological, and aesthetic justifications that it was viewed as an integral and nearly unassailable component of Soviet rule in the region. It is easy to imagine how these differing goals might have led to contradictory policy initiatives – for example, diverting products of artistic crafts entirely away from local markets in favor of foreign export. Yet for the most part this does not appear to be what happened. Instead, all of these goals tended to become lumped together, to become a package deal, so to speak, so that policies fundamentally motivated by the goal of increasing exports would also cite the consumption needs of the local population, and policies primarily addressing local needs would also include provisions for the production of unique, high-quality objects for museum display. To be sure, not all of these goals were always serviced equally well in practice. But on a conceptual level, the goals of increasing exports, developing Central Asian craftsmanship into a form of “high art” of international renown, and fulfilling the nationally-specific needs of local consumers tended to become intertwined and, by and large, imagined as mutually reinforcing rather than competing. This fact helps explain the durability of the policy of national goods production in Soviet Central Asia, its persistence across nearly the entire span of Soviet history, and the fact that it never faced a direct

ideological challenge during this time in spite of significant shifts in official visions of consumption and modernity from Stalin to Khrushchev to Brezhnev.

In a more practical and concrete sense, this policy facilitated the work of ethnographers, artists, and art historians in the preservation of elements of Central Asia's material cultural past; not only permitted but incentivized the creative work of indigenous artisans from the pre-revolutionary period; created the necessary institutions and official impetus for the transmission of these artisans' expertise to new generations; and entrenched the production of nationally-specific consumer goods to the point that they were both available and, at some points, in near-ubiquitous use among the indigenous population fully through the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The availability within the Soviet economy of these ethnically distinctive "national goods" alongside more standardized "modern" consumer goods presented Central Asian consumers with choices that were highly laden with social and cultural meaning: between objects that were "national" and those that were "European," between designs coded as "traditional" and those presented as "modern." As will be seen, the fretful discussions on the nature of nationality, modernity, and authenticity that surrounded national goods production both drew on and contributed to disagreements and anxieties within Central Asian society that continued to play out in the realm of consumer culture through the 1960s and 1970s.

Over the course of the Soviet period, the production of national goods grew into an entrenched feature of Soviet rule in Central Asia and a constituent part of how Soviet nationalities policy was understood and implemented in the region. It reflected Stalinist beliefs about the "primordial" and durable nature of national cultural differences, but also manifested an ambition to accommodate lived ethno-cultural difference within the Soviet socialist project. Taken in aggregate, the officially mandated production of Central Asian national goods not only reveals something significant about Soviet attitudes toward Central Asian cultural distinctiveness and certain elements of the region's pre-revolutionary culture, but also substantively shaped the experience of living under Soviet rule for Central Asian

consumers. If in other, high cultural spheres the Stalinist promotion of “national cultures” may be more easily dismissed as mere ethnic tokenism or as a statist appropriation of local cultural symbols, the Soviet production and sale of Central Asian-style consumer goods was powerful in both a symbolic and material sense. Because these objects became part of everyday domestic and personal life, of interactions with family and guests, of both celebratory occasions and mundane daily activities, their place in Central Asian life was both more intimate and more routinized than the more public and spectacular high cultural spheres that have normally been studied in histories of Stalinist efforts to foster national cultures. Even when state-produced national goods were in limited availability in Soviet shops, the policy of national goods production was accompanied by an official discourse that sanctioned and normalized the home-production and use of these goods, which was a ubiquitous feature of Central Asian rural life through at least the 1970s. The coming chapters will show that the entrenchment of “national goods” as a constituent part of life in Soviet Central Asia created opportunities for people to live, visibly, in non-standardized, non-homogenous ways, to assert a variety of ethnic and cultural self-identifications, to engage in locally-specific social and cultural practices and ways of life. It effectively de-politicized and legitimated a certain carefully defined but quite expansive portion of Central Asian ethnic and cultural difference. In short, it made room within Soviet socialist society not only for Central Asian “national culture” in the sense of a set of public signifiers and ascribed national identities, but for uniquely Central Asian modes of domesticity, sociability, and daily practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Designing Soviet Central Asia: Artistic Experts, Ethnic Kitsch, and the Question of National Style

While the Soviet planned economy was finding a space to accommodate the production of “national” goods, including artisanal and handcrafted ones, a parallel set of discussions was taking place in artistic conferences, meetings of cooperatives and production ministries, and the press, with the participation of artists, art historians, ethnographers, architects, and employees of economic institutions. At issue in these discussions was not so much whether state institutions should produce Central Asian-style goods (the policy itself was called into question surprisingly rarely), but rather what Central Asian “style” meant or should mean in the twentieth century. There were three points of tension that repeatedly emerged in these debates between the 1930s and the 1980s. First, there was the question of whether the Soviet state’s approach to Central Asian design should emphasize preservation and perpetuation of the pre-revolutionary artistic heritage, or modernization – and what that modernization should entail. Should Soviet Central Asian design hearken back to the achievements of the region’s pre-revolutionary past, or should it evolve in step with modern conditions? Second, there was disagreement about the balance between producing Central Asian crafts as a form of high art – emphasizing quality, uniqueness, and display in museums and international exhibitions – and as everyday objects – emphasizing functionality, reproducibility, and the needs of Central Asian consumers. Finally, there was a persistent concern about authenticity, alongside disagreement about what exactly an “authentic” Central Asian style would look like. Was “authentic” Central Asian material culture to be discovered through ethnography and art history, or through a study of contemporary consumption habits in cities and on collective farms? Soviet experts fretted about the potential for inauthenticity from a wide range of sources, from the anachronistic stagnancy of pre-revolutionary Central Asian ornamentation to its “eclectic” fusion with modern and European design elements, from the divergence

of Central Asian art from the everyday lives of the laborers to the kitschy consumerist tastes of the laborers themselves. By airing contradictory positions on each of these questions, debates about Central Asian design and “applied art” came to serve as a key battleground in the larger debate about the content of Central Asian nationality under modern, Soviet conditions.

For the most part, these disputes played out within rarefied professional circles, among academics, artists, and state employees rather than among ordinary Central Asians. In Soviet Central Asia, as in the USSR more generally, the category of individuals I am describing in this chapter as “professionals” or “experts” were often not strongly distinguished from Soviet officialdom; they were all members of their corresponding state-regulated professional unions (Union of Artists, Union of Architects, and so on), and many of them also occupied administrative positions in other Soviet economic or cultural institutions. Moreover, Russians and other “European” (that is, not ethnically Central Asian) residents of the region were typically overrepresented relative to the indigenous population as the most vocal and combative participants in these debates. Such discussions are thus less important for revealing Central Asian perspectives on issues of nationality and culture – which, on occasion, they nevertheless do – than as a benchmark for the level of uncertainty and room for disagreement that existed within Soviet discourse on questions of the content of national cultures and the allowable space for permanent, visible ethno-cultural difference as a feature of socialist modernity. In this sense, these debates both retrace the major beats of the chronology that has already been outlined in Chapter 1 – the origins of a diversity-positive discourse of ethno-cultural difference during the Stalin era, challenges to this discourse under Khrushchev, and finally its reaffirmation and ascendancy in the Brezhnev-era 1970s – and reveal the deep divergences in opinion and interpretation that lay behind this overarching narrative. Although cultivating the appearance of unanimity, the oft-repeated formulas of Soviet nationalities rhetoric – socialist content and national form, the dialectic of the national and international – were far from self-explanatory, and in fact obscured a fundamental

divide in understandings of the place of ethnic distinctiveness and local cultural heritage within a modern, socialist society.

This chapter will examine theoretical debates on the content and development of Central Asian art under Soviet auspices that played out in discussions not only of artisanal objects but also of Central Asian visual arts, music, and architecture. Because these debates revolved around the category of Central Asian “art” as it was understood in Soviet professional spheres, they tended to address only the subset of Central Asian-style consumer goods that were typically described in Soviet discourse as “folk artistic crafts” – carpets, embroideries, Bukharan gold stitching, Kyrgyz felt *shyrdaks*, carved wooden furniture and decorative objects, painted ceramics, and so on – while ignoring less explicitly decorative kinds of “national goods,” and in particular, clothing, which will be discussed further in later chapters. Yet these debates interlaced with the broader problem of Soviet Central Asian consumer culture in a number of ways. First, they highlight a fundamental divide at the heart of Soviet nationalities discourse and practice as it pertained to Central Asia, between what I am calling “Europeanizing” and “particularizing” trajectories. Both positions envisioned a future of harmonious “internationalism” among the various peoples of the USSR, but they understood internationalism in two distinct ways: the first, as cultural homogenization to be achieved through the progressive modernization and Europeanization of Central Asian design, and the second, as a sort of utopian multiculturalism in which Central Asian artistic cultures would be encouraged to maximally develop their unique features in order to better share them among the Soviet community of nations. While this dichotomy in official thinking and practice never disappeared, the “particularizing” position became increasingly dominant on a local level during the Brezhnev era, enabling a strong affirmation of Central Asian ethno-cultural difference that colored both official language and the approach to Central Asian material culture within Soviet institutions. Without a sense of the prominence and growing audacity of this multiculturalist discourse within Soviet artistic and cultural institutions, it will be impossible to understand how the Central Asian-

language Soviet press was able to go so far in asserting culturally distinctive consumption norms in the 1960s and 1970s, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, without ever falling completely outside the bounds of official permissibility.

Second, the post-war advent of something like a consumer culture within the Soviet Union introduced a new set of fears and ambivalences to discussions about art and cultural heritage, and these new anxieties ultimately served to add further fuel to the particularizing position. By the 1970s, a growing cohort of artistic professionals and Soviet intelligentsia had begun to express alienation from the tendencies toward industrialism and consumerism that they labeled as ills of capitalist modernity but saw taking root within their own society as well. They posited locally particularistic “folk art” grounded in pre-Soviet cultural traditions – including Central Asian folk art and traditional-style decorative items – as an antidote to the modern maladies of depersonalized mass-production and consumerist kitsch. Being offered as a counterweight to the degenerative effects of a consumer culture identified with the West, “authentic” and ethnically distinctive Central Asian artistic traditions and objects of material culture could be increasingly imagined as socialist in their own right.

Finally, in addition to their interest as artifacts of Soviet discourse on nationality, debates among Soviet artistic professionals shaped the consumer culture of post-war Soviet Central Asia in more direct ways as well. While there was no mass popular participation in discussions on the nature of Central Asian style and its fate under Soviet conditions, the consensus opinions that arose out of these discussions were disseminated widely. To the extent that particular interpretations of Central Asian design came to be regarded by state decision-makers as legitimate aesthetic expertise, they were folded into the language of the official policies detailed in Chapter 1. The views of experts on Central Asian art were publicized and promoted through reportage in journals and newspapers, in museum exhibitions, and in documentary television programs and films. They were carried by individual artists, architects, and ethnographers into enterprise-level Artistic Councils, where they exerted influence (though in the

artists' opinion, never enough) over the design of goods approved for mass production. Finally, this group of experts spoke directly to Central Asian consumers through articles published in the local-language Soviet press offering advice on how to properly select, use, and discern quality in various kinds of "national" goods. As narrowly academic and theoretical as these debates often seem, then, they carried real stakes for the residents of the region: they were involved in the process of defining which goods and consumer behaviors were normalized, legitimated, or even valorized and which were stigmatized in the Soviet public sphere.

"This question has remained unresolved": Grappling with socialist content and national form under Stalin

The Stalinist formula "socialist in content, national in form" is often cited in histories of the Soviet Union as a tidy encapsulation of the state's efforts to hollow out and instrumentalize the national cultures of non-Russian peoples. As Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly put it in their introduction to the volume *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, "Official disregard for the integrity of the cultures and identities of the Soviet nationalities was succinctly expressed in the Stalinist dictum 'national in form, socialist in content.' National identities would be tolerated, that is to say, only to the extent that they could be shaped and controlled by the central authorities."¹ Yet debates among Soviet artistic experts about the desired nature of Soviet national cultures make it clear that this formula offered little clarity or explanatory weight even for its contemporaries. For professionals and officials facing concrete questions about Central Asian design and its future development under the Soviet system, in particular, the lack of clarity only engendered perplexity, and ultimately, the advocacy of dramatically divergent positions. Artistic experts disagreed about whether socialist content implied artistic "modernization,"

¹ Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, "Introduction: National Subjects," in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

about whether the national specificity of art should be derived from the pre-revolutionary past, but also about how nationality and socialism should be balanced and interrelated within a single object or artwork. Differing opinions on these questions led to a divergence in Soviet practice between, on the one hand, an ethnographic and art-historical approach to design which sought to recreate the best of pre-revolutionary Central Asian art, and on the other hand, an attempt to engineer “progress” in Central Asia through the introduction of either socialist ideological content or European (at times specifically Russian) artistic models. Moreover, although an unambiguous consensus never came about, and contradictory positions continued to be aired both in internal discussions and in print through the 1980s, the extreme position in favor of modernization and the effacement of national distinctiveness was held at bay. By the Brezhnev era, the concept of “national form” in Central Asian folk art, rather than signifying a mere hollow shell to be filled with socialist content, had expanded to include the capacity to convey culturally-specific meanings and values and a continuous connection to centuries of pre-revolutionary national history.

Defining socialist content. Far from following a clear blueprint handed down from above, efforts to introduce socialist content into Central Asian art were carried out in an atmosphere of experimentation. From quite early in the Soviet period, artists and intellectuals who advocated for the preservation of folk art, both in Russian and in Central Asia, struggled with the question of how it ought to be transformed under the aegis of a proletarian state. What exactly would it mean to make the peasant handicrafts of the pre-revolutionary period into something modern and socialist, and could it be done without destroying the characteristic features of the folk artistic tradition? The years following the revolution saw some intriguing experiments along these lines. In Palekh, a center of Russian icon-painting that had attracted the interest of nationalist intelligentsia in the late 19th century,² religious

² Andrew Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation in the Brezhnev Era,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 44/4 (Oct.-Dec. 2003): 630.

subject matter was supplanted during the 1920s not only by secular fairy-tale images, but also by images of dinosaurs and extinct mammals, evidently intended to convey a sense of scientific modernity, in works with titles like “The Jurassic Period” and “The Ice Age” (Figure 2.1). In Central Asia, during the artistically adventurous early years of Soviet rule, some artists sought to introduce an even more avant-garde vision of modernity to folk artists and artisans, but their efforts quickly came under fire within the community of advocates for folk art. A disapproving 1923 article in the journal *Russkoe Iskusstvo* lambasted the efforts of newly established painting and sculpture workshops in Tashkent as “trying to make a cubist or a suprematist out of a Muslim.”³ The problem with these efforts, according to the article, was not merely that unsuitable avant-garde models had been chosen, but that indigenous artistic values had been compromised in this attempt to drag Central Asian art into the 20th century. “Only an unfamiliarity with the East and the artistic feeling of its inhabitants could create such absurd methods,” the author wrote, adding significantly: “It is remarkable that where the directors did not interpose their ‘Europe’ and did not hamper those they were leading, the Sarts [Central Asians] produced striking works.” The question of whether the modernizing tutelage of ethnically non-Central Asian professionals was doing more harm than good, and whether the symbolic gains of modernization were worth the perceived aesthetic losses, became a sticking point in debates on Central Asian design for decades to come.

After the canonization of socialist realism as the officially endorsed Soviet artistic style in 1934, the range of approaches to the problem of introducing modernity and socialist content into Central Asian handicrafts narrowed considerably. The most common methods during the mid- to late Stalin era involved a painfully literal application of the term “socialist realism”: the direct incorporation of Soviet iconography into Central Asian design (the sickle and hammer, the five-pointed star, and so on), the incorporation of representational and hence “realistic” elements alongside traditionally abstract

³ A. Niurenberg, “Pis’mo iz Turkestana,” *Russkoe Iskusstvo* no. 1, 1923, 103-104.



Figure 2.1. Palekh miniature “The Jurassic Period,” by N.M. Zinov’ev. Source: A.V. Bakushinskii, *Iskusstvo Palekha* (Moscow: 1932).

ornamentation (portraiture, human or animal figures, and scenic images), or both.⁴ Traditional handicrafts incorporating explicit Soviet imagery proliferated both due to direct state commissions for propaganda works, usually for display in public buildings or in all-union or international exhibitions, and due to the simple fact that works including such imagery tended to be rewarded with publicity, accolades, and state prizes. A 1938 competition held by the Uzbek artisanal producers’ cooperative offered monetary prizes of up to 1500 rubles to individuals who could draft designs for embroideries “saturated with new Soviet themes and reflecting the energetic growth of socialist construction in Uzbekistan and the potential for its further development,” with the winning designs to be displayed at an international exhibition later that year in New York.⁵ The document laying out the conditions of the competition offered highly specific instructions for the design of Uzbek embroidered wall-hangings (*so’zanas*), which were required to programmatically depict three stages in the historical development of the Uzbek SSR: the pre-revolutionary past, the period of “socialist construction in Uzbekistan as a

⁴ See, for example, *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 11-12.

⁵ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 116, 127.

result of the correct Leninist-Stalinist nationality policy,” and the “Uzbekistan of tomorrow,” which was to include portrayal of “prospects for the development of the leading branches of the Uzbek economy.” Similarly, designs for traditional Uzbek headwear intended for the New York exhibition were instructed to incorporate images of “cotton, fertile gardens and vineyards, silk production (specific elements), Soviet emblems, and so on.”⁶ In Kyrgyzstan, the Producers’ Cooperative had held a similar competition in 1936 for objects to be displayed in an international exhibition in Paris, and the felt *shyrdaks* and embroidered silk portraits of Lenin and Stalin produced for that exhibition were so well-received by Soviet officials that in the following years they were cited as part of the justification for rapid expansion of state investment in Kyrgyz crafts.⁷

As Kyrgyzstan’s experience suggests, the rendering of portraits of Soviet leaders or other state-endorsed historical figures in the medium of a traditional Central Asian method of craftsmanship – embroidery, ceramics, woven mats, and so on – became a common method of introducing “socialist content” into folk crafts during the Stalin era. The subjects of portraits in Uzbek and Kyrgyz handicrafts ranged from Russian literary figures like Pushkin and Gorkii to the Uzbek medieval poet Alisher Navoiy, but unsurprisingly, the most frequently portrayed figures in major, high-profile works were Lenin and Stalin.⁸ One of the quintessential examples of this genre was an embroidered silk portrait of Stalin, shown surrounded by grateful Uzbek and Russian laborers, executed by the Uzbek artisan Fazilat Saidalieva for the occasion of Stalin’s 70th birthday in 1949 (Figure 2.2). A 1954 Soviet text praised Saidalieva’s embroidery for its propagandistic as well as artistic value, observing that in such works “it is impossible not to see one of the most progressive and promising tendencies of this art [of Uzbek embroidery], which has an especially great importance for the Communist education [*vospitanie*] of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, 126-127. (Note: Page numbering in this *delo* is reversed.)

⁷ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 3, d. 19, 229; TsGA KR F. 350, Op. 8, d. 29, 35; TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 1, d. 17, 38.

⁸ GARF F. A-643, Op. 1, d. 71, 4; TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 1, 275-276; TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 235, 42-43.

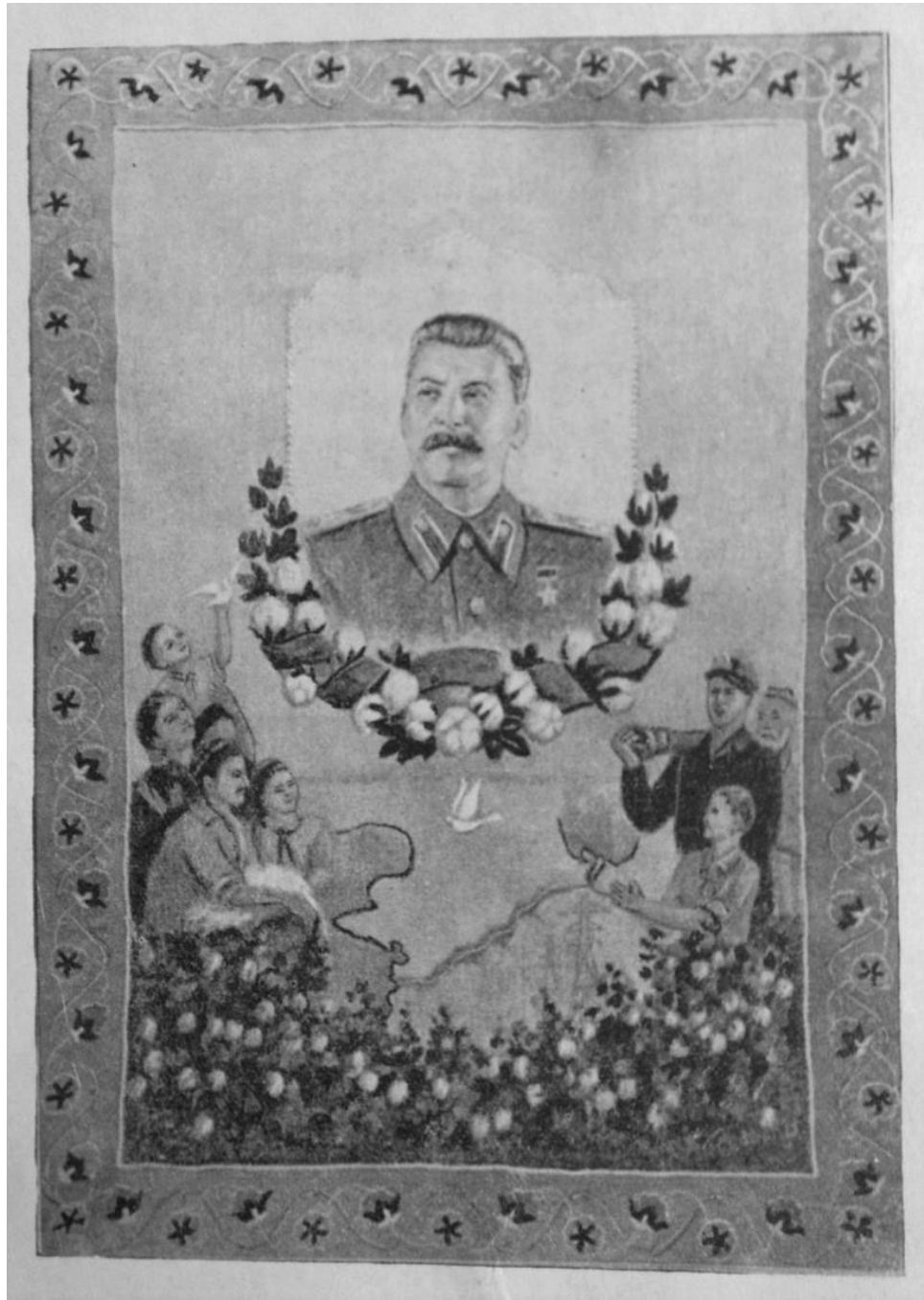


Figure 2.2. Stalin tapestry embroidered by Uzbek master Fazilet Saidalieva. The tapestry was created to mark the occasion of Stalin's 70th birthday in 1949. Source: O.A. Sukhareva, "Vyshyvka," in *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 111.

people.”⁹ Saidalieva later won the state title of “People’s Artist” for her completion of a second embroidered Stalin portrait.

As a rule, the portrait images in such works were not devised by Central Asian artisans themselves, but copied from well-known painted portraits or photographs that constituted canonical public images of the leaders; in the case of Saidalieva’s 1949 work, the model was a frequently reproduced photograph of Stalin taken in 1942. Artistic institutions exercised especially careful control over objects adorned with leader portraits, rejecting works that were “weak in terms of the portrait resemblance,” or, to borrow a term, off-model.¹⁰ Even for a portrait of Pushkin, at this point a state-endorsed figure from Russian literary history but by no means on par with figures like Lenin and Stalin, the task of designing a “template” image to be used by Kyrgyz carpet-weavers was delegated to a Russian artist, with the justification that “the incorporation of portraits is new for the Kyrgyz, and for this reason the portraits in the carpets that have been produced are far from satisfactory.”¹¹ Because leaders’ images were so carefully protected and subject to strict centralized supervision, both the autonomy of the individual artisan producing the work and the allowable contributions from local artistic traditions were correspondingly constrained, reduced essentially to the medium itself (e.g. embroidered silk) and, often, a traditional-style ornamental border surrounding the portrait, intended to carry the weight of national specificity. In a sense, this particular method of combining “Soviet” and “Central Asian” elements embodies the most cynical and reductive version of the formula “socialist content and national form”; the message of the work was the personality cult, in its centrally cultivated and tightly controlled form, while national specificity was reduced to the particular medium through which the local people chose, inevitably, to glorify Stalin. A 1952 play by prominent Soviet Uzbek writer

⁹ *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 111.

¹⁰ GARF F. A-643, Op. 1, d. 71, 7.

¹¹ TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 1, 275.

Abdulla Qahhor, titled “The Silk So’zana” (*Shohi so’zana*), employs one of these objects specifically for its cultic function, ending with a scene in which “the [Uzbek] collective farmers enthusiastically gaze at a silk so’zana sewn with an image of Comrade Stalin.”¹²

The high-profile successes of works like Saidalieva’s, combined with repeated state orders to drum up such works for exhibitions in Moscow and abroad, ensured that this particular version of socialist content in Central Asian art would prove to be quite durable. But not everyone in the Soviet artistic establishment was pleased with it, and almost from the beginning, there was pushback within both official and professional spheres against the most blatant attempts to foist socialist imagery on folk art. Already in 1933, a *Pravda* satire had laid out some limits at an all-union level on the heavy-handedness with which industrial imagery could be introduced into decorative crafts, repudiating as “vulgar” and “absurd” the production of patterned cloth adorned with little rows of tractors, factories, and so on.¹³ With the elevation of art to a privileged position within Soviet policy and discourse, professional gatekeepers of artistic quality began to decry what they regarded as excessive obviousness or inelegance in the integration of a political message into a work of art. By 1949, a speaker at a Russian artistic conference could characterize the work of a Palekh master of the 1920s that had portrayed St. George with a banner reading “Proletarians of the world unite” battling a dragon with the caption “The hydra of the revolution – capitalism” as a naïve and laughable, albeit forgivable, early attempt to integrate socialist content into Russian folk art.¹⁴

After Stalin’s death and the initiation of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization efforts, a similarly critical eye turned on works like Saidalieva’s that had earlier enjoyed official esteem. According to one Soviet architect’s vehement 1963 article, the embroidered leader portraits produced by Central Asian artisans,

¹² “Yangi spektakllar. ‘Shohi so’zana,’” *Ozbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* No. 22, Nov. 1952.

¹³ D.A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Izdatel’stvo literatury i iskusstva im. Garfura Guliyama, 1972), 59.

¹⁴ GARF F. A-643, Op. 1, d. 351, 52.

in addition to being a product of the “cult of personality” that Khrushchev had denounced a few years earlier, were aesthetically objectionable as well, their “unskillful copies from more or less well-known portraits... standing in flagrant contradiction to the professional mastery and stylistic unity of the [traditional-style] ornamentation” around the portrait’s border.¹⁵ In the process of criticizing the most obtrusive efforts to insert Soviet political messaging into folk art, these post-Stalin discussions often doubled as a defense of Central Asian artistic traditions. To give one example, there was evidently a period in the 1960s when Uzbek skull caps began to be embroidered with modern, “scientific” images like satellites and chemical flasks, but these designs were quickly rejected for their heavy-handedness and perceived tackiness – or, as a Soviet art historian more gently puts it, “serving as an echo of great exciting events, they rarely found an adequate artistic expression,” and quickly disappeared.¹⁶ But it is significant that they were outmatched not only in terms of consumer demand but also, increasingly, in the appraisals of Soviet artistic professionals themselves, by the traditional black and white design of the *Chust do’ppi*, which was praised for its “classical maturity and restraint.”¹⁷

While the introduction of overtly Soviet imagery into folk handicrafts met with increasing professional dissatisfaction, the “realism” component of socialist realism pointed to an alternative, less flagrant but still politically charged, path toward the modernization and “Sovietization” of Central Asian art. Realism, in this context, was interpreted to mean representational as opposed to purely abstract and ornamental art. The depiction of landscapes, human figures, and other recognizable real-world objects was regarded as evidence of socialist progress and artistic modernization in Central Asia, where, Soviet artistic experts often repeated, Islamic prejudices had previously stymied the development of realistic art. Because pre-revolutionary Muslim authorities had allowed “only ornament, calligraphy,

¹⁵ S. Khmel’nitskii, “Sud’ba natsional’nogo stilia v Srednei Azii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* No. 3 (Mar. 1963): 24.

¹⁶ Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana*, 123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and non-representational [*bezsiuzhetnoe*] applied art,” the use of representational images could be framed as a “repudiation of the sharia,” and hence as socialist and Soviet, even in the absence of explicitly ideological imagery.¹⁸ Moreover, Stalin-era discussions tended to portray the transition from abstract ornamentalism to representationalism as an evolutionary development within art history, arguing that representation constituted “the next stage in the natural development of the style and technique” of Central Asian folk art.¹⁹ Alongside objects with more overtly political content, works adorned with representational imagery of any sort were often greeted with copious praise within the Soviet Central Asian press, including such seemingly apolitical works as a gold-stitched Bukharan skull cap decorated with a stylized image of a peacock.²⁰

For a time, the efforts of Soviet artistic institutions to foster representationalism in Central Asian handicrafts went hand-in-hand with the introduction of self-evident Soviet imagery; after all, “portraits of the great leaders of the Soviet people,” images of “the Moscow Kremlin, to which the gaze of all freedom-loving peoples is directed,” and “landscapes of the transformed cities and villages of Uzbekistan” all served as admirable subject matter for the new representational endeavors of Central Asian artists and artisans.²¹ But particularly in the post-Stalin period, the types of works that were praised for showing the way forward for Soviet Central Asian folk art were typically much less Moscow-centric in their vision of “socialist content.” In fact, many of the most publically acclaimed crafts from this period deliberately strove to maintain their national distinctiveness and cultivated a resemblance to traditional folk art in spite of the artistic changes brought about by the introduction of representational elements. They often employed two methods for subsuming representationalism into the “national”:

¹⁸ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 494, 10; TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473, 53.

¹⁹ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 116, 131.

²⁰ *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, 184-185.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

first, using a degree of abstraction and stylization to incorporate representational images into more traditionally ornamental designs, and second, utilizing representational imagery to depict specifically national scenes. An example of the former can be seen in a pattern for a Kyrgyz wall-hanging drafted by D. Ümötov and featured in a 1967 issue of the Kyrgyz Soviet women's journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* (Figure 2.3), which incorporates simplified human figures as part of a repeating geometric motif.²² An example of both strategies is a 1959 gold-stitched embroidery (the collaborative work of Russian and Uzbek artists), which portrays human figures with specifically national markers, showing them dressed in traditional clothing and enjoying tea from *piyolas*, and arranges them in a way that echoes the ornamental sunburst pattern of traditional Uzbek needlework (Figure 2.4). A Soviet art historian's exegesis of this second design explains that its aesthetic success depends on the unobtrusive way that representational elements are melded with local artistic sensibilities: "The artist again turns to the conventional language of the art [of Uzbek embroidery] and, in introducing the depiction of people, subordinates them to the ornamental order of the embroidery."²³

Objects like these thus suggested a rather different model for the introduction of socialist content into Central Asian art than the one implied by embroidered Stalin portraits. On the one hand, both overtly political content and stylistic "modernization" were deliberately restrained for the sake of aesthetic integrity (as it was understood, of course, by Soviet artistic experts) and the preservation of local traditions of design and craftsmanship. On the other hand, the notion of socialism and Sovietness was conveyed primarily with images of local life rather than of Moscow or Stalin. In the above 1959 Uzbek embroidery, signifiers of Central Asianness like *piyolas*, traditional garb, and copious melons and grapes seem to be offered less as a counterweight or complement to "socialist content" than as a stand-in for it: this is, the image suggests, the flourishing, nationally distinctive life and art that is only possible

²² *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 4 (Apr. 1967).

²³ Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana*, 127.



Figure 2.3. Pattern for a Kyrgyz *chiy* wall-hanging. Created by artist D. Ümötov, 1967. Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 4 (Apr. 1967).



Figure 2.4. Integrating “national” human figures into a traditional sunburst motif. Uzbek gold-stitched panel designed by V. Stoliarov and M. Akhmedova, 1958-1959. Source: D. A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativnoe-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva im. Gafura Guliyama, 1972), 127.

in Central Asia under Soviet rule. This particular version of nationalities thinking, which equated Sovietness not with the diminishment of national expression but with maximal, almost delirious celebration of difference, would become increasingly dominant during the late decades of Soviet rule.

Yet like the introduction of Soviet iconography, the gradual incorporation of representational elements into ornamental design failed to permanently resolve the question of how to bring “socialist content” into Central Asian folk art. Some expressions of unease arose among artistic experts as early as the 1930s, when critics noted that, even in the absence of overtly political content, attempts to “mechanically” combine Central Asian ornamentalism with representationalism could produce, at best, a sense of incongruity, and at worst, “the profanation of authentic art.”²⁴ But the greatest dissatisfaction with representationalism in Central Asian art arose during the Brezhnev era, fueled in part by a nostalgic search for authenticity and a recoiling (not entirely without a sense of professional snobbery) from the kitschy byproducts of cultural interchange and mass production. By 1969, A. Sokolova, an ethnographer and perennial commentator on Central Asian folk crafts, offered a deeply pessimistic assessment of the question of “Representationalism or ornamentalism?” (*Siuzhetnost’ ili ornamental’nost’?*) in the Soviet design journal *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, exclaiming, “What did it cost Uzbek folk art, this intrusion of thematic representationalism and portraiture into its fixed ornamental world?! Now we soberly assess the losses and gains of artistic style.”²⁵ As would become increasingly common during the Brezhnev era, Sokolova linked her aesthetic concerns about the Sovietization of Central Asian design to a more fundamental problem of authenticity: “As soon as the [Uzbek] masters touch on something introduced, something alien [*prishlogo, chuzhdogo*], their instinct of taste betrays them, and they often become helpless where they had only just been shining with individuality and mastery: eclecticism is born.” The confidence of the earlier modernizing discourse,

²⁴ TsGA RUz F. 2325, Op. 1, d. 116, 131.

²⁵ A. Sokolova, “Siuzhetnost’ ili ornamental’nost’,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* No. 6 (Jun. 1969): 34.

which had sought to frame Soviet content and representationalism as the natural, evolutionary next steps for Central Asian art, had been shaken to the point that a professional in good standing could suggest that these things were instead “introduced” and “alien,” incongruous in a Central Asian context and perhaps wholly incompatible with Central Asian artistic traditions.

While never entirely rejecting the task of bringing socialism into Central Asian artistic crafts, and remaining very much embedded within the Soviet cultural establishment, artistic experts of the post-Stalin period nevertheless expressed growing dissatisfaction with trajectories of modernization and Europeanization that they saw as harmful to local aesthetic values and traditions of craftsmanship. By the 1970s, as we will see, this critical position would open up an expanded space within artistic discussions for advocacy of the national and the traditional at the expense of both overtly European and overtly political elements. Nevertheless, in the absence of any professional consensus on an alternative means of bringing socialism to Central Asian art, Stalin-era habits continued to hold sway within many Soviet institutions; in 1976, seven years after the publication of Sokolova’s article, the Kyrgyz journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* chose as its front cover image a photograph of a recently-produced *chiy*, a traditional Kyrgyz reed mat decorated with dyed wool, featuring an image of Lenin modeled after one of his more famous painted portraits (Figure 2.5).²⁶

Defining national form. If Soviet experts were unable to ever fully agree on what would constitute “socialist content” in Central Asian folk art, the related question of the meaning of “national form” proved to be even less transparent. Apart from distinct languages and periodic pro-Soviet parades in ethnic costume, it was never entirely clear what the “national culture” element of Soviet nation-building was supposed to entail, and in particular, to what extent it should be rooted in local

²⁶ *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 4 (Apr. 1976).

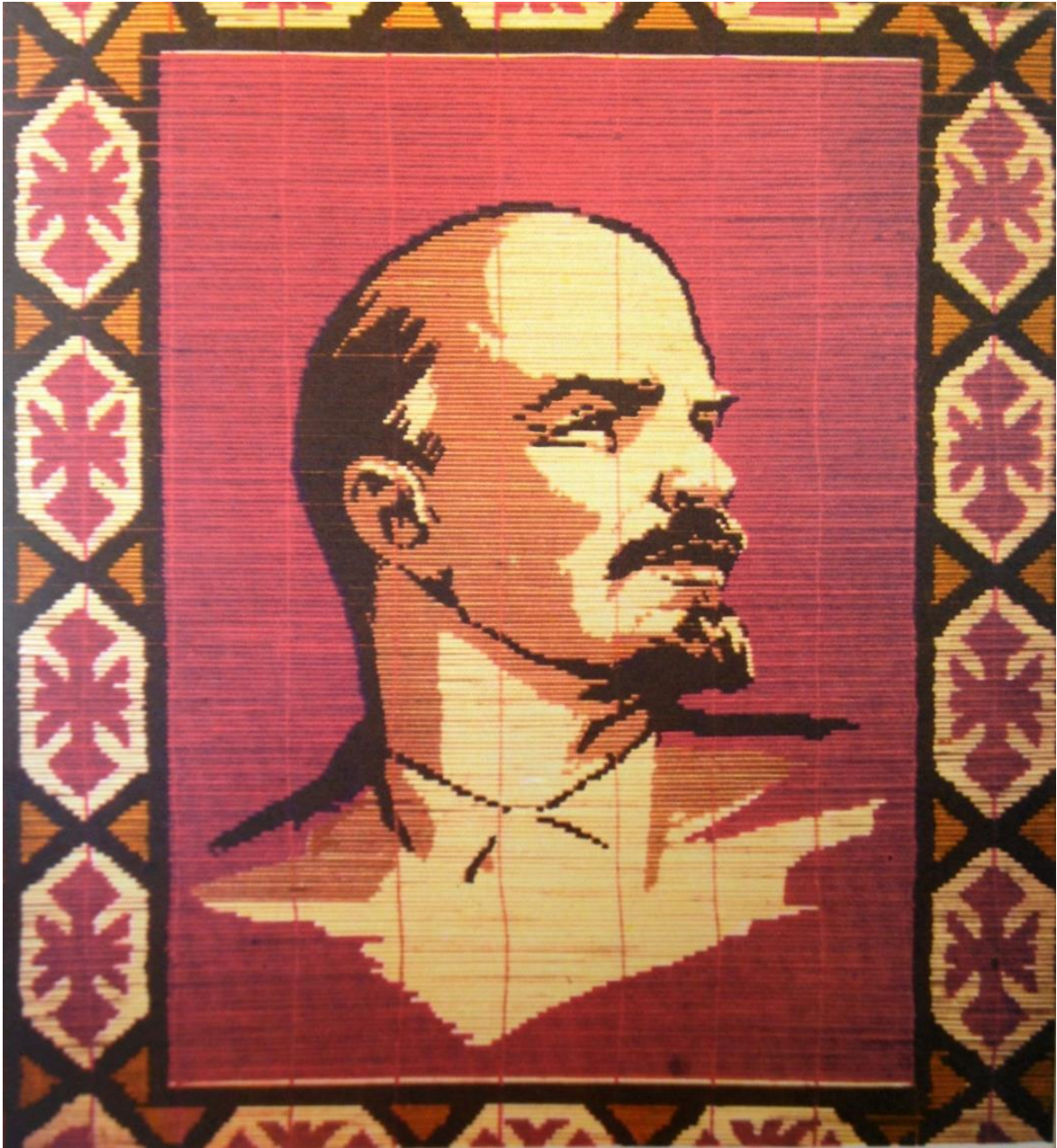


Figure 2.5. Kyrgyz *chiy* mat with Lenin portrait. The central image of this 1976 *chiy* renders a famous painted portrait of Lenin in the traditional Kyrgyz medium of reeds wrapped with dyed wool. Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aaldary* no. 4 (Apr. 1976).

practices or pre-revolutionary traditions. Professionals in the fields of art and folk crafts repeatedly requested clarification on this matter, and expressed frustration with the vague and evasive answers they received. Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, when a Moscow-based representative attempted to explain the meaning of "national form" before a conference of artists from Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the chairman of the Uzbek Union of Artists, surnamed Abdullaev, condemned the speech as unilluminating and unhelpful: "He was not able to resolve the question of national form in art, and this question has remained unresolved."²⁷ The transcript of the conference suggests that Abdullaev was not alone in his frustration; his statement was followed by numerous unidentified voices calling out, "That's right, that's right!"

The problem was that, however clear and internally consistent it sounded in its most sophisticated, "dialectical" theoretical expression, the Soviet theory of how the state's cultivation of nations would lead to the anticipated internationalist future grew considerably more messy and uncertain in practice, particularly in its application to culturally unfamiliar and "backward" republics like those of Central Asia. First, there was a problem of definitions. What was "national culture" in Central Asia, and in particular, what was its relationship to the pre-revolutionary past? Very often, in keeping with the spirit of primordialism and romantic nationalism that took hold during the Stalin era, artistic experts took for granted that the Soviet cultivation of Uzbek or Kyrgyz "national culture" would entail an unabashed celebration of (certain selected) pre-revolutionary traditions. But others balked at the way this approach failed to adequately cull class-based or religious components from the national, and some even went so far as to contend a definition of national culture grounded solely in contemporary Soviet Central Asian life, completely independent of the pre-1917 past. Second, there was the question of methods. Assuming the ultimate goal was to transcend nationalism to attain a universal internationalist culture, would this be best achieved through a process of gradual convergence (implying a policy of

²⁷ TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 96, 67.

promoting the steady introduction of Russian or European cultural features), or by means of pushing national expression to its fullest extent, at which point it would ostensibly burn itself out and subside (implying a policy, in the short term at least, of maximal promotion of national distinctiveness)? Each of these approaches was pursued – and critiqued – at various times within various Soviet Central Asian institutions. The result was that in the course of the Stalin era, these institutions engaged in the creation both of new hybrid works of the sort described in the previous section and of objects that were all but exact replicas of pre-revolutionary handicrafts (Figure 2.6, Figure 2.7).

Finally, one can also detect within these discussions a significant difference of opinion surrounding the ultimate goal of Soviet nationalities policy itself, hinging on two quite different understandings of the future of socialist “internationalism.” Many historians have presumed that the desired endpoint was cultural homogeneity throughout all of the republics of the Soviet Union, with the desired “universal” culture being modern and basically European in nature. In this view, the attainment of socialist internationalism – however distantly deferred into the future – would mean that Central Asian cultural specificity had been extinguished, that an Uzbek or Kyrgyz person would live, dress, and act essentially as a Russian person did. This ultimately assimilationist, homogenizing aim is encapsulated in official formulas forecasting the “drawing together and fusion [*sblizhenie i sliianie*]” of the various Soviet nationalities. But total cultural uniformity was not the only utopian vision that could be fostered under the wing of Soviet nationalities policy. In fact, rhetoric about Central Asian art increasingly pointed to the ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union and its active promotion not just as an instrumental strategy on the path to the dissolution of nations, but as a positive good in itself. One of the most unambiguous expressions of this position can be found in the 1982 work of Kyrgyz theorist T. Usabaliev on the relationship between the international and the national in the Soviet system. The idealized community of the “Soviet people,” Usabaliev wrote, “is not a nationless formation, nor an alternative to socialist nations.” Instead, it would be “an international community” characterized by “the



Figure 2.6. Stalin-era Uzbek *so'zana* embroidered on silk. Completed in 1934. Source: V.M. Vasilenko et al., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1984).



Figure 2.7. Assorted regional varieties of the Uzbek *do'ppi* produced in the late 1930s. Source: V.M. Vasilenko et al., *Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo, 1917-1945: ocherki istorii* (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1984).

indestructible unity of nations and nationalities, which maintain their ethnic distinctiveness.” Rather than “the extinguishing of national specificity,” *sblizhenie* would entail the enrichment of each national culture and the mutual exchange of unique “national experience.” The uniquely national, Usubaliev argues, is capable of “expressing what is universally human” and “elicit[ing] delight among grateful posterity, regardless of national membership,” as the works of writers like Pushkin, Tolstoy, Ayni, and Navoiy prove.²⁸ This ideal of a multi-ethnic future was implicit in the statements of a number of artistic and cultural professionals already during the Stalin era, and in later decades it could even be described as the dominant way in which Central Asian national cultures were discussed, at least within the region itself. In this interpretation of Soviet nationalities policy, the desired “internationalist” future was framed less in terms of cultural homogenization than of the productive interchange of diverse cultures – less “fusion” than a permanent “friendship of peoples,” an international patchwork of mutual cultural appreciation and interchange.

Stalin-era disputes: Russocentrism and romantic nationalisms. By the Stalin-era 1930s, the rhetoric of Soviet nationalities policy had already become equivocal and multivalent enough to support widely diverging opinions on the meaning and future of Central Asian national culture. One of the key points of contention during these years was the question of the relationship between Central Asian cultural forms and Russian culture (whether as a paragon of civilization in itself, or as a gateway that would lead “backward” Central Asian societies to “modernity” and broader European culture). Within the sphere of art and design, a fairly clear divide developed between advocates of the gradual introduction of Russian/European elements into Central Asian art – whom I am identifying for the sake of convenience as the “Europeanizers” – and advocates of a more untampered-with Central Asian artistic tradition – whom I will call the “particularizers.” To be clear, these categories are my own. They

²⁸ T.U. Usubaliev, *Rukovodiashchaia rol' KPSS v ukreplenii edinstva internatsional'nogo i natsional'nogo v sovetskom sotsialisticheskom obraze zhizni* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo “Kyrgyzstan,” 1982), 26, 136-138.

do not represent well-developed schools of thought or sharply distinguished factions within Soviet artistic institutions as much as individuals who shared certain tendencies of interpretation and advocacy. Nor is the point that these positions were theoretically irreconcilable; they could be more or less logically held together within the carefully controlled rhetoric found in official pronouncements and theoretical tracts. But when the complexities of theory trickled down to local experts and institutions empowered to make concrete decisions on the basis of these principles, this apparent theoretical unity tended to dissolve into a number of positions of competing emphasis, interpretation, and implementation.

The “Europeanizing” approach to national cultures, as its name suggests, argued that it would be natural and progressive for Central Asian artistic culture to absorb the influences of Russian and European art. This position was bolstered both by the evolutionary framework of Soviet nationalities policy, which posited that national distinctions were the product of a historical stage en route to internationalism, and by Stalin’s elevation of Russian culture to the position of “first among equals” within the Soviet system. According to this rhetoric, the adoption of non-Central Asian – particularly Russian – influences was not antithetical to national culture, but part of its proper historical trajectory. After a festival of Kyrgyz art in 1939, the Moscow-based All-Union Committee on Affairs of the Arts evaluated the success with which Kyrgyz artists had succeeded in “embracing... the entire enormous European culture and above all the culture of Russian art, with the help of Russian comrades.”²⁹ One of the Russian representatives at this meeting, Gorodinskii, lectured Kyrgyz artists on the inherent limits to the value of indigenous artistic traditions: “If our comrades will build their culture while leaning only on the achievements of Kyrgyz music, on poetic and other folklore, they will not be able to get far... It’s necessary to understand that ‘national’ does not at all mean ‘narrowly folkloric.’”³⁰ Gorodinskii

²⁹ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 1, d. 38, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13

remained circumspect on how exactly one might create a new Kyrgyz national style with the incorporation of European elements; the most concrete suggestion he gave was that Kyrgyz music should incorporate violins and violin-cellos, “at which European culture arrived after a thousand years of development,” alongside traditional instruments like the *kyiak* and *komuz*. But the most important point, in his view, was that Central Asian national cultures were not to be understood as congruent with pre-revolutionary Central Asian tradition. National cultures in the Soviet sense were not to be static and unchanging, but should benefit from the progressive influences of surrounding cultures. Here, too, Gorodinskii claimed, Central Asia could learn from the historical experience of Russia, whose great 19th-century composer Glinka had absorbed “elements of all national cultures – German, Italian, French, and so on” and about whom a contemporary had commented that “Glinka remains national, Russian, [even] when he writes Spanish music.”³¹ Characteristically for such discussions, no one clarified how it was that Glinka’s essential Russianness was conveyed in his music in spite of his adoption of non-Russian cultural influences. But the intention behind the anecdote in its application to Kyrgyzstan was clear: Kyrgyz “national art” did not and should not mean a form of Kyrgyz art that existed prior to and independent of Soviet, Russian, or European influences.

In the most extreme version of the “Europeanizing” interpretation of Soviet national cultures, the connection with pre-revolutionary tradition might be broken entirely, and the national specificity of a people could be located solely in their particular experience of contemporary Soviet life. In evaluating the artworks submitted for an upcoming 1936 exhibition in Kyrgyzstan, for example, the chairman of the jury committee, M.L. Belotskii, complained of a painting titled “Prosperous life” [*Zazhitochnaia zhizn'*], “There is nothing specifically Kyrgyz. To eat watermelon in Kyrgyzstan is not a ‘prosperous life.’” But his objection was not to the lack of Kyrgyz ethnic or cultural markers, but rather to the artist’s failure to convey the specific ways Stalin-era prosperity was (or should be) experienced in Kyrgyzstan: “In

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

executing this theme, it's necessary to bring in precisely what is typical, what distinguishes Kyrgyzstan from the ranks of other peoples of the USSR who are also beginning a prosperous life. What is characteristic of a Kyrgyz when he is made prosperous? He builds a European house, he puts in a [European-style] bed and furniture for himself, he obtains a sewing machine."³² The extent to which Belotskii's characterization of Kyrgyz consumption habits is accurate will be discussed in later chapters; but for the moment, it is striking that in pushing for increased "national form" in the artworks for the 1936 exhibition, he was looking for visible tokens not of ethnic difference but of its gradual disappearance, not of local tradition but of Europeanization. To be sure, Belotskii's interests may have lay less with the question of national form as such than with a desire to introduce a prescriptive model for how to live a good Soviet life for the Central Asian visitors to the exhibition. It is a testament to the plasticity of the Soviet concept of national form, though, that he could argue that Kyrgyz national distinctiveness could be signified in Central Asian art with images of Kyrgyz people consuming European-style houses and furnishings.

As tempting as it might be to dismiss the "Europeanizing" position as a mere smokescreen for Russian or European chauvinism, though, in fact it could be considerably more nuanced than that. Certainly, some of its defenders straightforwardly believed in the aesthetic superiority of Russian art, and others justified their advocacy of artistic Europeanization with threatening language that linked the "preservation of outdated [Central Asian] canons" to "the reactionary ideology of bourgeois nationalism."³³ But there were also those who, on the contrary, framed the Europeanizing position in terms of a commitment to anti-colonialism and an egalitarian attitude toward Central Asian artistic cultures. They argued that rigid adherence to local pre-revolutionary traditions was not a sign of cultural respect, but rather of a fascination with exoticism and primitivism which demeaned Central

³² TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 1, 12.

³³ *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, ed. G.P. Iakovleva (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva, 1955), 7.

Asian art and suppressed its development. In a 1936 letter to the Council of People's Commissars of the Uzbek SSR, the director of the Uzbek Museum of Art, A. Lamakina, argued that the practice of "exactly copying old examples" of Uzbek handwork appealed not to Central Asian consumers themselves, but to foreign and predominantly Western European importers of Central Asian products. The result of this "demand abroad for antiquity and exoticness, for 'authentic Asia' [*podlinnuiu Aziuu*]" was to create a rift between Soviet Central Asian art and the real experiences and desires of the Soviet Central Asian consumer and to "artificially hamper the normal growth of new art and, under the pretext of preserving supposedly national forms, pull it backward toward feudal tradition."³⁴ Interestingly, similar discussions were occurring in Russia during this period as well. A 1949 conference of the Russian republic's Research Institute for Folk Artistic Crafts centered on a speech by art historian A.N. Pravdin, who lambasted the early Soviet artistic theorist A.V. Bakushinskii for fetishizing Russian peasant art as "primitive" and "archaic." Pravdin furthermore suggested that these views "derived from the attitudes of the reactionary camp of bourgeois scholars," and in particular from colonialist and racist thinking about "primitive" peoples.³⁵ Within Central Asia itself, attempts to take up the banner of progress and modernization in art while seeking to strip it of the Russocentric chauvinism that often accompanied it developed further in the post-war period (as in the 1963 Khmel'nitskii-Rempel' debate described below), but the seeds of this position were already visible in the Stalin-era 1930s.

There was another side to the coin of the Stalin-era rhetoric on nationalities, though, one which denied that "national culture" in its Soviet sense was an empty vessel for historically changing practices or an agglomeration of surrounding "progressive" cultural influences, and instead emphasized the primordial and deep-rooted nature of national differences, grounding them in the distant pre-revolutionary past and, often, projecting them indefinitely into the future. While this "particularizing"

³⁴ TsGA RUz F. 837, Op. 32, d. 2473, 19-20.

³⁵ GARF F. A-643, Op. 1, d. 351, 14.

strain of rhetoric did not necessarily stand in direct contradiction to positions advocating a guiding role for Russian culture, it could produce discussions that were strikingly different in tone and emphasis and that implied a very different set of policies to guide the future of Central Asian art. Although this particularizing discourse found ample support in Soviet ideology and official rhetoric (most famously Stalin's line about each nation's unique "contributions to the treasure-house of world culture"), it should be noted that the most ideologically slippery of these discussions tended to take place in rather different settings than the *ex cathedra* official pronouncements of the Moscow center. Here the geographical setting for the discussions seems to have been more of a determinant than the ethnicity of the speakers; even while a great number of advocates for the Europeanizing and Russocentric positions could be found within Central Asia itself, regional and local discussions often contained the expression of greater sympathy for the "particularizing" position, and taking greater liberties with it, than their all-union counterparts.

One of the more remarkable examples of this can be found in the discussion surrounding a 1937 Uzbek exhibition of the work of Central Asian painters, recorded in the archives of Uzbekistan's Union of Artists, which was suffused with a triumphant atmosphere of romantic nationalism. V.K. Rozvadovskii, an ethnically Russian member of the Uzbek artists' union and a vocal advocate of Central Asian folk art,³⁶ opened his remarks on the exhibition by asserting that non-Russian peoples shared an inherent, even biological, connection to their ethnically particularistic traditional art forms. He related the story of an experiment carried out by a certain Leningrad professor, who had supposedly invented a device that could scientifically monitor the responses of listeners to different kinds of music. These experiments had found, Rozvadovskii claimed, that a Tatar man exhibited only minor biological responses to the music of Chopin, but responded greatly to a "national Tatar song," and this "completely clearly and

³⁶ See Chapter 1.

vividly showed to everyone the kind of reaction produced by that which is one's own [*rodnoe*]."³⁷

Another artist at the meeting, surnamed Konobeev, remarked that one could have known this even without a special device, and Rozvadovskii responded, "I agree with you, that even without the needle [on the device monitoring reactions] it's possible, but these were scientific experiments." Science had, he proposed, conclusively verified the reality of national sentiment and the subjective effects produced by nationally specific art. No caveats were given about the temporariness of this phenomenon or its connection to a particular stage of historical development. Given the care that official Soviet rhetoric took to distinguish nationality from biological race, Rozvadovskii's proposition, presuming that national difference penetrates to the level of biology, where it may be measured by scientific instruments, seems to fall a bit wide of the party line;³⁸ even more so, perhaps, his placing of the products of a local (Muslim) folk culture on the same level as the works of a giant of "universal" (European) culture like Chopin. But this statement was nonetheless in keeping with the general tenor of the discussion on the exhibition. Konobeev himself had earlier made remarks that similarly sought to situate Central Asian national distinctiveness in the deepest recesses of the individual, claiming that the steppe paintings of the Kazakh painter Tansykbayev were instantly recognizable as Kazakh because of the artist's "exceptional love for nature, such an intense poetic relationship with nature," which is "inherent to him as a Kazakh."³⁹ Even in the post-collectivization Soviet 1930s, Konobeev implied, a Kazakh artist innately carried a special relationship to the steppe connected with his people's nomadic heritage, and this historical legacy of difference did not signify "backwardness," but an admirable spiritual quality that continued to be inscribed in the artist's worldview and in his artworks.

³⁷ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 34, 43.

³⁸ Francine Hirsch notes that in the context of the rise of German race theories in the early 1930s, the Soviet state instructed professional ethnographers to "wage war against biological determinism." Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 231-233.

³⁹ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 34, 37.

Contrary to the positions of Gorodinskii and Belotskii, then, which minimized the place of folk culture and pre-revolutionary tradition in the proper understanding of Soviet national cultures, arguments like these treated both tradition and durable ethno-cultural difference as integral components of “national form.” Indeed, it was commonplace for terms invoking Central Asia’s pre-revolutionary history, such as “tradition” [*traditsiia*], “heritage” [*nasledie*], and “roots” [*korni*], to be used as synonyms for national specificity in art within these discussions. Generally, advocates of the “particularizing” position were careful to explain that not every aspect of historical Central Asian culture was properly national, using Stalinist phrases like “the best traditions” or “progressive traditions” to clarify that the evils of a class-based, feudal, and religious society had been sifted away to leave only what was populist, democratic, and compatible with contemporary Soviet life.⁴⁰ But in spite of such efforts to maintain the appearance of unanimity, or at least of broad compatibility with the Europeanizing position, this rhetoric could be used to undergird very different priorities for the development of Soviet Central Asian art. In practice, such “particularizers” tended to downplay the homogenizing fusion of Soviet cultures, and especially the wholesale borrowing from Russian and European artistic traditions, and instead advocated a separate path of development for Central Asian art. A speaker at the Kyrgyz Committee on Affairs of the Arts in 1937 urged that rather than pursuing the “well-trodden path of unity with European art,” Kyrgyzstan’s artists ought to “search for a path growing upward from roots in national art.”⁴¹ Like a Greek mythic hero who had been deprived of his strength, referenced in “a very nice passage in the recent report of Comrade Stalin,” the speaker noted, “it will happen to us too that our art will lose itself and become stunted if it does not have roots in folk art.” At the meeting assessing the steppe paintings of the Kazakh artist Tansykbaev described above, another commentator concluded, “In my opinion, the art of Tansykbaev, if it is moving toward universal

⁴⁰ RGAE F. 4272, Op. 66, d. 2786, 67; GARF F. A-643, Op. 1, d. 290, 2; TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 132, 26.

⁴¹ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 1, d. 20, 75.

art, then it is nevertheless making its way [*probivaetsia*] through national form.”⁴² Without directly speaking against Gorodinskii’s advocacy of Russian and European influences in Kyrgyz music, one of the few ethnically Kyrgyz representatives at the 1939 meeting proposed a trajectory for the development of Kyrgyz art that stood in tension with Gorodinskii’s bald rejection of a “narrowly folkloric” understanding of nationality. Speaking in Kyrgyz through a Russian translator, Abdylas Maldybaev observed, “We are still in the stage of revealing in a full sense the folk musical wealth of the Kyrgyz people.” He requested the aid of the all-union committee in Kyrgyz artists’ efforts to “exhaust, in the near future, the authentic [Russ. *podlinnoe*] folk art from its wellsprings, to exhaust all that is at its heart.”⁴³ The question of whether the development of Central Asian art under Soviet auspices would entail the introduction of European repertoires and violins to Kyrgyz orchestras, or ethnographic expeditions to collect “authentic” Kyrgyz folk music, or both, was anything but clear within the rhetoric on Soviet nationalities of the Stalin-era 1930s. As with “socialist content,” artistic experts based in Central Asia were forced to feel out the meaning of “national form” through a pattern of experimentation punctuated occasionally by strong signals of approval or censure from the Moscow authorities.

The fate of Uzbek music during the late Stalin-era “anti-cosmopolitan campaign” (1949-1952), as described by historian Kiril Tomoff, demonstrates the potentially decisive impact that central intervention could have in these artistic discussions, even while illustrating relative rarity of such direct and heavy-handed intercession from above. In the Russian context, the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, which introduced a new strain of virulently anti-Western (and anti-Semitic) rhetoric into Soviet art criticism, can be plainly understood as part of the Soviet state’s turn toward Russocentrism, asserting the value and self-sufficiency of Russian national cultural traditions against Western European ones. But as Tomoff explains, cultural institutions within Uzbekistan “interpret[ed] the language of

⁴² TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 34, 96.

⁴³ TsGA KR F. 1603, Op. 1, d. 38, 51.

anticosmopolitanism as a justification (or excuse) for promoting their own national music culture, even at the expense of Russians or other representatives of European culture.”⁴⁴ The result was a sharp rebuke from Moscow which rejected a “separate path” for Uzbek music and affirmed that, in Tomoff’s words, “‘classical traditions’ meant ‘Russian classical traditions’ everywhere in the Soviet Union.”⁴⁵ This episode is symptomatic of the experimental and sometimes unpredictable pathways that local artistic experts pursued in response to the ambiguous policy and rhetoric emanating from Moscow. Yet the direct and forceful response that this particular experiment elicited was exceptional. Most of the time, the rhetorical flights of local enthusiasts like Rozvadovskii and the improvisational efforts to fit central initiatives into local realities faced by Central Asian cultural institutions, as precariously related to the official line of the moment as they might be, went unremarked upon. For one thing, they were typically restrained more by self-censorship, and by the routinized central commentary provided by figures like Gorodinskii in connection with all-union and international exhibitions of folk handicrafts and performances of folk music and dance, than by the kind of forceful intervention from above that marked the anti-cosmopolitan episode. But there also seems to have been considerable space, even during the Stalin era, for minor digressions and deviations to pass under the radar, going unnoticed except for in exceptional cases, especially on such an ambivalent and poorly understood question as the meaning of national culture in Central Asia.

It is important to note, too, that as decisive as the rejection of Uzbek folk music’s “separate path” sounds, it was both limited in scope to the question of national music specifically, and only served to shut down discussion on the issue very briefly thanks to Stalin’s death soon afterward in 1953. Central Asian “national traditions” in other realms of art, and particularly in the arena of folk handicrafts which is our primary focus here, were by no means rejected during this period. As Saidalieva’s 1949

⁴⁴ Kiril Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path: Interpreting ‘Anticosmopolitanism’ in Stalinist Central Asia, 1949-52,” *Russian Review* 63/2 (Apr. 2004): 213.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

embroidered Stalin portrait shows, Central Asian folk art was pressed into the service of the personality cult during its post-war zenith, with traditional ornamental design being relegated to a secondary position, but arguments that it should be eliminated or replaced with “Russian classical traditions” were conspicuously absent. At the same time, in the parallel domain of mass-produced goods, the folk artistic crafts workshops that had been reopened in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan after 1943 continued to operate through these years,⁴⁶ and a 1951 decree of the Producers’ Cooperative of the Kyrgyz SSR decisively affirmed the production of national-style goods for local consumers, ordering its institutions to “increase the volume of production of national clothing, shoes, headwear, and objects of household use to levels fully satisfying the need of the indigenous population for these types of goods.”⁴⁷ If the permitted space for traditional Central Asian design within “national art” seems to have reached a low ebb during the last years of the Stalin era, with its rigid artistic canons and exultant Russocentrism, it never closed entirely, and completely new arenas for debate and experimentation would soon be thrown open in the discussions that followed in the wake of Stalin’s death.

From “form” to “content”: Rethinking national cultures after Stalin. Two major inter-republic conferences held for the artists of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the first in September of 1953 and the second in September of 1955, directly broached the question of the meaning of “national form” in Central Asian art and its relationship to the pre-revolutionary past. The result was far from an unambiguous affirmation of Central Asian artistic traditions; in fact, it was in many ways a recapitulation of the fundamental disagreements that had existed since the 1930s. What was new, however, was the increasingly blunt and earnest way that these disagreements were presented, as the superficial appearance of unity that had been maintained during the Stalin era increasingly fractured into a variety of competing positions.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 5, d. 96, 8.

The 1953 conference opened with a speech from a representative of the Moscow-based Union of Artists named Melikadze, whose remarks elicited the incensed response of the Uzbek Union's chairman Abdullaev mentioned at the beginning of this section. Melikadze began his explication of national form by relating that a recent conference of artists from the Caucasian republics had been held in Tbilisi, "where this question was posed in a very pointed manner and where the most diverse opinions and thoughts were expressed." In particular, he said, some of the artists at the Tbilisi conference had expressed the opinion that "there cannot be national form if the artists of Georgia, for example, study under Russian artists," while others had added that "national form cannot be created in art without knowing how its precursors of the 12th-17th centuries looked, what their external attributes were." "This point of view," Melikadze explained, "is incorrect":

Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Armenian – all of these peoples remain national [*vse eti narody ostaiutsia natsional'nymi*]. These peoples have already been established as socialist nations, having national specificities and markers. And in order to reveal the life of the people, to show this life, to preserve all of the national characteristics of the people, to make one's works socialist in content and national in form, it is not necessary to rummage around [*kopat'sia*] in the 12th and 17th centuries and introduce the ornamentation of these centuries into one's picture.⁴⁸

Speaking as an all-union representative before a Central Asia-based specialist audience, Melikadze urged an understanding of Soviet nationality that was not centered on the pre-revolutionary past but on modern life. Just as Soviet peoples "remain national" under contemporary conditions, in the presence of modern technologies and a socialist economic system, a complete break with the past would not render Central Asian cultures any less national. Creating national art, Melikadze argued, required no specialized knowledge of the centuries-long local artistic heritage. It only required the artist to "know the life of one's own people and show it as it is today," and "not only to know, but to love in one's heart and nurture in one's soul that which is best, progressive, which belongs to the future." More explicitly than many of the Stalin-era commentators who shared his view of nationality, Melikadze suggested a

⁴⁸ TsGA KR F. 1403, Op. 1, d. 96, 14-15.

turn away from the ethnographic and art-historical approach to Central Asian national form, orienting the understanding of Central Asian nationalities instead toward the Soviet present and future.

What is especially unusual in comparison with the discussions of the Stalin era, though, is the degree to which Melikadze's attempt to check local experts' enthusiasm for pre-revolutionary Central Asian artistic traditions elicited open antagonism and opposition in his audience. In part, these representatives of local cultural institutions were reacting to the continued vagueness of the developmental path for Central Asian art that Melikadze proposed; it was clear from his speech what Central Asian national form was *not* supposed to be (the ornamentation of the 12th-17th centuries), but positive definitions were offered only in the haziest of terms. As the chairman of the Union of Artists of Kyrgyzstan, Mikhalev, commented, "Comrade Melikadze said that the task of creating national form rests only, on the whole, in loving one's people and being interested in its life. This is correct, but this is not a theoretical solution to the problem. We had a right to expect that in this auditorium it would be illuminated in more detail."⁴⁹ Doubtless present, as well, was an interest in defending a field around which considerable local expertise had been built from an outsider's encroachment. The feelings of frustration and resentment were augmented by the sense that Melikadze, a representative of Moscow, was addressing these issues "at a distance of 4000 kilometers," as Mikhalev put it, oblivious to the real, concrete problems that Central Asia-based experts faced in their daily work. Mikhalev's Uzbek counterpart, Abdullaev, agreed that the Moscow-based Union of Artists chronically ignored the struggles of its Central Asian branches. It was this sense of geographical and institutional resentment, in fact, that provoked Abdullaev's remark that Melikadze "was not able to resolve the question of national form in art, and this question has remained unresolved." This statement, it should be noted, came even in the absence of a desire to defend Central Asia's pre-revolutionary artistic heritage; Abdullaev himself, in what seems like a non sequitur even in context, advocated for a Russocentric resolution to the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

problem of national form: “Comrade Melikadze was unable to characterize how to transmit the Russian classics to our national artists... We, comrades, cannot create national images without studying the Russian classics.”⁵⁰

But defenders of local artistic traditions did speak up as well, most notably in the case of a student of Moscow State University attending the conference, with the Central Asian surname Aini. He seized on Melikadze’s dismissive reference to “rummaging around in the 12th-17th centuries,” retorting, “With this he repudiates the entire spiritual culture of the people and the aesthetic values created by the people in the past.”⁵¹ In Aini’s understanding, “national form” was unimaginable without reference to pre-revolutionary history, and Melikadze’s attempt to locate nationality purely in the present was tantamount to a rejection of national specificity altogether. While “socialist nations have only now been formed,” the cultural content adhering to those nations was not of similarly recent vintage, but instead, “national culture, national character, national color [*natsionla’nyi kolorit*] were already established long ago, over the course of several hundred years.” To the question of the development of Central Asian art, Aini conceded that the practice of merely replicating earlier artistic forms, like Central Asian miniature painting of the medieval period, betrayed a “superficial” understanding of national form. But he argued that Melikadze had leapt to the other extreme, “rejecting all art of the past only because it is conditional and historically limited [*uslovno i istoricheski ogranicheno*].” The true task of a Soviet Central Asian artist, he concluded, lies in “revealing [*raskrytie*] the national uniquenesses of character, the specific peculiarities of a given people, which are very concrete and individual and which every nation doubtless possesses, [and] showing national color in a landscape, the national color of a given locality and so on.”⁵²

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 157.

Two tendencies characteristic of the “particularizing” position of the Stalin era are given especially strong expression here. First, there is the primordialist understanding of nationality, which presumes that ethnic and cultural differences are rooted in the distant historical past; national uniqueness is not fashioned by artists, but “revealed.” Despite the Marxist recognition that they are “conditional and historically limited,” Aini presupposed that these differences would not rapidly disappear under Soviet conditions, but would continue to be carried within Central Asian individuals and Central Asian “spiritual culture” for the indeterminate future. Second, there is the proposition that the task of Soviet artists is not to narrow the gulf between Russian or European art and Central Asian art, but to fully plumb the depths of national distinctiveness. The goal, at least for the time being, is not to facilitate the gradual rapprochement of Russian and Central Asian national cultures, but the fullest exploration of “national uniqueness,” the “specific peculiarities” of each people, and exotic “national color.” While Aini’s recommendations on how to develop Central Asian art under Soviet conditions are no less vague than those offered by Melikadze, the fundamental discrepancy in their approaches is clear: if Melikadze sees artists’ allegiance to the pre-revolutionary past as an obstacle to artistic modernization and the collaborative work between Russian and non-Russian artists, Aini sees the past as the key to the goal of achieving maximal “nationalness,” and hence maximal difference, in Central Asian art.

Placed on the defensive by the procession of forceful (and politically charged) criticisms of his opening speech, Melikadze responded with a mixture of bafflement and faltering attempts to justify himself. Admitting that he may have mistakenly oversimplified matters in his discussion of national form, he nevertheless added, “However, not in Russia, not in Moscow, not in Khar’kov, not in Kiev, nowhere is the question posed the way it is here [*nigde ne stavitsia vopros tak, kak on stavitsia u vas*].” In Russia, he suggested, the problem of national form had been resolved rather simply; listing a number of contemporary Soviet Russian artists, he challenged the audience to deny that they represented

“national Russian artists,” and concluded, “All of them are national artists, and in their works, socialist content is expressed in national form.”⁵³ The fact that Melikadze appears to have been genuinely taken aback by the vehement response his remarks elicited from this particular audience is suggestive both of the communicative gap between Moscow and Central Asia (as well as, evidently, the Caucasus, from which he drew his first negative example) and of the especially thorny and difficult nature of the question of national form when paired with radical ethno-cultural difference. Noting that his comment on “the 12th-17th centuries” had touched a particular nerve, he struggled to clarify that his position was not a rejection of national uniqueness, or even a rejection of the past, but a rejection of the “exoticism” which presumed that authentic national culture could only be found in pre-revolutionary history. “I know that a tendency exists among your artists,” he observes,

wherein in order to give works a national form, they are projected into the past, projected into exoticism... When I said that for the creation of works [on the subject] of modern life it’s not necessary to rummage around – either they exist in life or they don’t, it’s not necessary to drag out ornaments from the 12th century – I had in mind – I was referring to the Caucasus more than to other places. There, there is an aspiration to introduce exotic features – I was speaking out against this.⁵⁴

The alarmed backpedaling of “I was referring to the Caucasus more than to other places” aside, Melikadze attempted to reclaim the anti-colonial high ground by contrasting his position with one that would equate national culture with exoticism, representing Caucasian or Central Asian cultures as permanently locked in a static medieval past.

Yet Melikadze again betrayed the double-edged nature of the Europeanizing position when he suggested that an appropriate model for contemporary Central Asian art might be the late 19th-century school of Russian realistic painters known as the *peredvizhniki*: “In the 19th century, there was no other art that could so deeply express that which was most progressive, the most progressive ideas, the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

strivings of the people, the deeply-expressed thoughts of one's own people, as Russian art, and it is for this reason that we must learn from it."⁵⁵ As during the preceding decades, arguments about Central Asian national culture and its relationship to the past became hopelessly entangled with arguments about its relationship to Russian culture. On the one hand, Melikadze advocated finding authenticity and national distinctiveness in the present, "in life," rather than in the past, in art history. The "national" and "folk" essence of art, in this view, lay in depicting the change and dynamism of Central Asian life as it was in the Soviet present rather than replicating the traditional and "exotic" artistic forms and images of earlier centuries. But on the other hand, Melikadze proposed that Soviet-approved Russian artistic canons, like the 19th-century *peredvizhniki*, might act as a *substitute* for 12th-17th century Central Asian canons as a model for contemporary "national" Central Asian art to follow. If the celebration of Central Asian artistic heritage carried with it the dangers of essentializing exoticism, many artistic professionals in Central Asia perceived the threat of cultural homogenization or outright Russification implicit in Melikadze's rejection of the local pre-revolutionary heritage.

The results of the 1953 conference, then, were anything but conclusive for the question of national form in Central Asian art. The disagreements aired between Melikadze and the representatives of Soviet Central Asian art did not erupt into the kind of scandal that would have invited central scrutiny of or intervention in the region's cultural institutions, like Uzbekistan's miscalculated approach to the anti-cosmopolitan campaign had a few years earlier. Instead, the conference exposed tensions within Soviet understandings of national culture, and between the ways it was applied in the center and the ways it was applied within Central Asia, that were perhaps uncomfortable but nonetheless officially tolerated. Melikadze quickly found that arguments which seemed to him to be self-evident and generally agreed upon were in fact vulnerable to counterarguments like Aini's that invoked the strain of Stalinist nationality discourse which treated national uniqueness, and in particular the "best traditions"

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

of the pre-revolutionary past (including traditions of folk art), as sacrosanct. The continued currency of these arguments held even beyond the purely local level is evident in the fact that Melikadze felt obliged to vehemently deny the implications that he was “opposed to cultural heritage [*kul’turnogo nasledii*] in general” and that his position entailed “a rejection and nihilism of the past.”⁵⁶ In this sense, the most significant outcome of the 1953 conference was to confirm that just a few years after the anti-cosmopolitan scandal in Uzbekistan, the guarantees of Soviet nationalities policy remained capable of acting as a check on attempts to initiate a radical break from the past in Central Asian art, and that “national form” remained an umbrella under which it was possible to launch an officially palatable defense of local pre-revolutionary traditions and lasting cultural difference.

Fittingly, then, when the second conference of the artists of Central Asia and Kazakhstan convened in Stalinabad (today Dushanbe), Tajikistan in 1955, the question of the meaning of national form was placed at its center: its opening address, delivered by an academic in the field of philosophy surnamed Skatershchikov, was titled “Form and Content in Art.” Skatershchikov’s speech, less polemical and more theoretical than Melikadze’s, generated a more muted reaction among its audience of Central Asian artistic experts; one representative from Kazakhstan complained that “when he spoke about national form, I had the impression that he did not introduce clarity but confused the issue further,” but others expressed vague approval.⁵⁷ Skatershchikov’s speech is primarily interesting, then, for the earnestly analytical way it attempted to add substance to the formula “national form and socialist content” – an endeavor which was increasingly typical in post-Stalin-era discussions – and for the surprisingly generous ground it granted to “national form” within this formula. Skatershchikov argued that within Soviet nationalities discourse, the terms “form” and “content” did not carry the same meanings as they did in the field of art. If in the technical artistic usage, “form” referred only to the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁷ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 458, 200-201.

external features of a work, a Soviet artwork that was “national in form” might in fact also express its national specificity in elements of artistic “content,” such as theme and meaning. Skatershchikov made clear that national form in this sense encompassed not mere superficial tokens of national distinctiveness, but a more profound dimension of cultural difference as well. Using the example of literature, he explained:

The language is not only written in Tajik, it is conceived of in Tajik as well – [this represents] the specificity of national thinking [*osoboennost' natsional'nogo myshleniia*]. It is indicated formally in an immediate way, but here there is content as well... The striving to convey specificities of character, attitudes toward life, specificities of thinking – you say, ‘Yes this is content!’ This is correct. The specificity of national art is manifested in some elements of its content.⁵⁸

In some ways, Skatershchikov was merely stating formally what had long been a component of “particularizing” thinking about Soviet national cultures – that national form was not merely a sterile conduit for conveying socialist content, but carried its own payload of specifically national ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and values – and moreover, that this was not a failing, but an intended feature. It is instructive, though, that Skatershchikov conveyed this idea by means of a revision (or perhaps erosion) of Stalin’s famous content/form binary. On the one hand, it demonstrates the inventive, animated way that artistic experts engaged with even the most stultifying official formulas in an effort to decipher a proper, socialist path for Central Asian national art. On the other hand, it offers some of the starkest evidence of the ways that “national form” was already expanding well beyond its strictest, most limited, most conditional definition, and foreshadows the coming decades when national cultures in Central Asia would come to be defined in professional discussions as much by “content” as by “form.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

De-Stalinizing Central Asian art or expunging national distinctiveness? The Khmel'nitskii-Rempel' debate, 1963-64

A debate about the future of Central Asian art that erupted in the all-union press in the closing years of the Khrushchev era in many ways served as the culmination and tipping point in discussions of the balance between the national and the international in Central Asian art. On one level, it represented the belated surfacing of tensions that had been papered over during the Stalin era through the repetition of formulaic phrases – “socialist in content, national in form,” “contributions to the treasure-house of world culture” – which lent divergent positions the appearance of ideological unity. On another level, the resurgence of interest in these questions evinced an atmosphere of earnest experimentation, an effort to reevaluate received wisdom and the inherited status quo, which was characteristic of the moment of Khrushchev-era de-Stalinization. S. Khmel'nitskii's initial article in the Soviet design journal *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, published in March of 1963, fundamentally called into question the aesthetic value, popular appeal, and long-term viability of Central Asian decorative arts under modern conditions, and even went so far as to suggest that the elements of traditional design and ornamentation that had been fostered in Stalin-era policy should be dispensed with altogether. But his position was not so much a rejection of Central Asian national specificity or an argument in favor of cultural homogenization as an attempt to seriously rethink assumptions about the locus of the “national” in Central Asian culture and its relationship to Central Asian consumers. On the other side of the debate, in his incensed and baffled response, Tashkent-based art historian L. Rempel' staunchly defended the Stalin-era rhetoric on folk cultures and even engaged in the sort of smear on Khmel'nitskii's ideological credentials that itself would not have been out of place in the late Stalin period. But his motivation in doing so appears to have been the defense of the right of Central Asians to cultural specificity and difference.

Alongside the expanded space for open disagreement on matters of substance, then, the context of the Khrushchev era also meant that this debate overlaid the question of the fate of national cultures in Central Asia with the politics of de-Stalinization. The complexity of these positions, with an old-guard Stalinist defending Central Asian tradition and an earnest de-Stalinizer advocating the revocation of certain established cultural allowances, reflects the ambiguous effects of the Khrushchev era within Central Asian experience more broadly. Khrushchev's "Thaw," which in Soviet history more broadly signified the lifting of the Stalin-era straitjacket on public discourse, in Central Asia was accompanied by a partial loss of the sphere of legitimated difference – religious, cultural, and national – that had been established under Stalinism. Most significantly, in the sphere of religion, Khrushchev's renewed campaign against Islamic practices meant that some individual Central Asians could experience the Thaw era as an intensification of repression rather than its diminishment.⁵⁹ The narrowing of the officially sanctioned ground for Central Asian ethno-cultural difference also made itself felt, although less harshly, in the sphere of national art and material culture. As the Khmel'nitskii- Rempel' debate demonstrates, the accommodation of national design that had been institutionalized in the Soviet Union since the mid-1930s came to be criticized not simply as a policy of the Stalin era but as a quintessentially Stalinist policy, symptomatic of the ideological deviation from internationalism, the propensity toward bourgeois luxury, and the rigid artistic canons that had characterized "the years of the cult of personality." Substantive disagreement remained as to what exactly should replace this Stalin-era status quo, but defenders of Central Asian art like Rempel' feared it would entail a demotion of Central Asian culture's prestige and legitimacy and its relegation to eventual extinction in favor of cultural homogenization.

⁵⁹ Eren Murat Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991," Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University: 2010), 252-335.

The debate opened with Khmel'nitskii's March 1963 article, "The Fate of National Style in Central Asia," which sharply criticized the canons of traditional ornamental design that had been institutionalized and promoted in Soviet Central Asia since the 1930s, with a focus the author's architectural area of expertise.⁶⁰ According to the article, both of the Stalin era's solutions to the problem of national art – the formulaic reproduction of pre-revolutionary traditions and the attempts to "modernize" national style through the addition of representational or ideologically Soviet elements – were equally pernicious. "The most dangerous thing of all," Khmel'nitskii declares, "is the artificial encouragement and propagation of faux-national ornamentation [*lozhnonatsional'noi ornamentiki*]. This is the illusion that this emasculated [*vykholoshchennyi*] and already long-dead style of decorative adornment can be revived by representational motifs and is capable of further development."⁶¹ On the one hand, the pre-revolutionary models for folk style that had been adopted and proliferated through Soviet institutions were in fact neither timeless nor particularly good, but were instead products of "the general cultural decline" that Central Asia had supposedly experienced in the late 19th century.⁶² On the other hand, juxtaposing traditional ornamentalism with "naturalistic depictions of cotton, melons, grapes – all with shadows, with the pretense of conveying volume and real color" merely serves to create "incongruous" results and "destroys the last good qualities of [Central Asian] ornamentation – unity of style and good taste."⁶³ Khmel'nitskii emphasized that the blame for these aesthetic transgressions lay not with Central Asian craftsmen, but with official policy and the practices of Soviet institutions. Art historians and critics, he said, were well aware of the artistic failings of such efforts to blend realism with ornamentalism but tended to encourage them anyway, assuming things would get

⁶⁰ S. Khmel'nitskii, "Sud'ba natsional'nogo stilia v Srednei Azii," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo* no. 3 (Mar. 1963): 23-25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24.

better with time. Khmel'nitskii even offered an implied reproach of the state's efforts to commission works of Central Asian folk art on "Soviet themes," claiming that recent works of Central Asian folk art "often have artificial success conditioned by their thematics: they are praised in the press, placed on exhibition, purchased for museum collections."⁶⁴ It was only the allure of such state incentives and the wrongheaded guidance of Soviet art specialists, Khmel'nitskii asserted, that compelled Central Asian masters to continue to practice a "moribund" style that had long since lost its organic grounding in local cultural life. "Thus is encouraged the production of completely senseless, pretentious, and eclectic things," he concluded, "lacking not only utilitarian suitability – that important quality of contemporary folk art – but also elementary good taste."

Apart from the characteristic Khrushchev-era concern for aesthetics, utilitarian functionality, and "taste," what is most striking in Khmel'nitskii's commentary is his equally central preoccupation with the issue of authenticity. The Central Asian art produced through Soviet institutions was not merely useless and ugly, he asserted, it was also "artificial," "faux-national," and "eclectic" – the last being a term that came to signify the arbitrary hybridization of different national artistic cultures in Soviet rhetoric. But significantly, this argument about authenticity was made not with reference to the body of Soviet ethnographic and art-historical research defining what was distinctively "national" for each republic, but instead to the lives and preferences of actual Central Asian consumers. At the heart of Khmel'nitskii's article lies an anecdote about his encounter with a collective farmer from Regarskii raion in Tajikistan. Khmel'nitskii recalls that upon visiting the farmer's home, its walls adorned with traditionally carved alabaster panels and its ceilings painted with geometric and botanical motifs, he had commented approvingly that "in the varied and harmonious decoration of the interior, the hand of a real master was felt." The implication seems to be that this represented a genuine, high-quality version of Central Asian folk craftsmanship, possibly originating in the pre-revolutionary period and untainted by

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the misguided artistic policies of the Stalin era, such that even Khmel'nitskii could not help but be impressed by it. But the collective farmer himself offered a quite different perspective: "Eh, this is all old. An old style. We will remodel soon, and then it will be beautiful. We'll put marble paneling on the walls and put up wallpaper. The ceiling will be smooth, like in the city. It will be very beautiful and cultured." Khmel'nitskii reflects on this determination to destroy what he regards as an exemplar of authentic, high-quality traditional architecture in favor of novelty with a strange blend of horror, paternalistic concern for the farmer's "taste," and acknowledgment of the man's position as fundamentally valid:

The aesthetic declaration of the Regarskii kolkhoznik is not simply a manifestation of his personal bad taste. He will, of course, carry out his monstrous plan. He is still fascinated by the bureaucratic "luxury" [*kazennai "roskosh'iu"*] of office interiors, by marble-paneled walls and oak-paneled doors. He still does not know what he really needs, but he knows very well what he does not need. Is it possible to more sharply and effectively reject spiritual participation in the "old" forms of decorative art, which not so long ago were still accepted as one's own, as national, as reflecting the inner content of artistic culture?⁶⁵

To the extent that Khmel'nitskii's conversation with the collective farmer was real and not invented – and that the farmer was speaking candidly and not dissimulating for the benefit of a prestigious urban visitor – it is highly suggestive. The basic reference points in this kolkhoznik's aesthetic ideal – newness, culturedness, the city – were essentially congruent with ideals promoted in the Soviet press of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁶ Yet from the perspective of Khrushchev-era experts like Khmel'nitskii, the man nevertheless manages to miss the mark; he aspires to the wrong *kinds* of modernness, urbanness, and prosperity, evidently modeled after the *meshchanstvo* (petty-bourgeois or philistine taste) of late Stalin-era urban homes and Soviet public buildings. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the efforts

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁶ Susan E. Reid, "Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 227-268. Khrushchev-era ideals of "cultured consumption" will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

of the Soviet state and artistic experts to aesthetically “educate” the population were consistently in tension with more subtly conveyed ideals of wealth, luxury, and taste, which constituted their own alternative model of modern and prestigious consumer practices.

More important for the moment, however, is that even while deriding the collective farmer’s “tasteless” aesthetic ideal, Khmel’nitskii regards his total disinterest in traditional forms of décor as legitimate. “I repeat,” he writes, “this is not an exception. Everywhere in the villages and cities of Central Asia I have observed the same highly significant phenomenon: traditional methods of decorative adornment in folk [*narodnoi*] architecture are more and more diverging from popular [*obshchenarodnyi*] tastes in our day.” Decorative carvings and paintings, he says, were everywhere being destroyed in favor of more modern (and, it is implied, European) styles of décor. As in the case of the Regarskii kolkhoznik’s home, Khmel’nitskii displays admiration for traditional Central Asian craftsmanship and a sort of nostalgic regret for its loss, but the conclusion is firm: such craftsmanship, whatever its merits, was no longer the possession of the entire people [*obshchenarodnyi*] and was no longer regarded as “our own” [*svoi*] or “national” by Central Asians. The residents of Tajikistan he spoke with “have parted ways, not grieving, with exoticism, dear to the hearts of ethnographers and art historians.” In decrying this rift between the preferences of Soviet decision-makers and the lives of the local population, Khmel’nitskii directly implicated the state’s mass production of Central Asian-style national goods as well: “Still someone endeavors to make 'national' carved furniture accessible to the masses, and thus the shops of Tajikistan are overwhelmed with absurd tables and nightstands covered in crude ornamental carving. They are expensive, they are senseless and ugly. People, of course, do not buy them.”⁶⁷ In short, he argues, what had been canonized and promoted by the Soviet state as “folk art” was no longer authentic, populist, or even national, but was instead founded in an artificial, exoticized, and unchanging – we might say essentialized – conceptualization of Central Asianness. How,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

he asks, could something which was “of the people” (*narodnyi*) fifty years ago, “when Central Asia essentially still had not escaped the Middle Ages that were so prolonged there,” continue to be of the people in the context of the 1960s, when Central Asians were spending their growing disposable incomes on radios, television sets, and motorcycles? Authenticity, Khmel’nitskii implies, resides not in the pre-revolutionary past but in the present, in the degree of harmony with and relevance to the day-to-day lives of Central Asian people.

For the most part, the stakes of the debate for Khmel’nitskii seem to have lay with the aesthetic damage done through the thoughtless promotion of Central Asian “national style” rather than the broader consequences of the tendencies toward exoticization and cultural essentialization he criticizes. But intriguingly, even while rejecting Central Asian design and ornamentation in sweeping terms, he gestures almost in passing toward an alternative space for the expression of ethno-cultural specificity in the region. Even as the Tajiks of Leninabad planned to panel over their carved and painted walls, Khmel’nitskii says, they remained “true to the living national traditions of their artistic culture” in other ways. Specifically, they continued to build their homes with the main entryway and windows facing the courtyard garden or orchard rather than the street. Khmel’nitskii makes clear that he is parting ways from the Soviet conventional wisdom in proposing architectural layout as an appropriate medium for the expression of national particularity, adding parenthetically: “By the way, it is long since time to refute the old fallacy that the ‘windowlessness’ of the street-facing facades of old Central Asian residences was a product of feudalism.” On the contrary, he says, this recently “has become a recognized, functionally well-founded method of urban construction.”⁶⁸ The addition of built-in wall niches, a feature of traditional architectural design in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to otherwise standardized home layouts represented, he claims, a similarly beneficial adaptation of “living national traditions” to contemporary circumstances. Khmel’nitskii is, in effect, recapitulating the idea that there

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

may be a specifically Central Asian way of being modern and Soviet, but this time in a Khrushchevian sense of those terms – aesthetic minimalism, utilitarian functionality, the rational organization of space.

The retort from L. Rempel', an enthusiast of Central Asian art and a prominent member of the Uzbek SSR's Union of Artists, came several months later, in the September 12 issue of *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*. (His observation that the March issue of *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* had arrived late in Tashkent also serves to establish him, in contrast to Khmel'nitskii, as "local" living and working in Central Asia, though not an ethnic Central Asian himself.) His article was titled "This is not up for discussion [*Eto ne diskussionno*]," and though he later claimed the title was not his own, the rest of the text adheres to its adamant and offended tone. Rempel' characterizes Khmel'nitskii's article as a "cheerful funeral," adding, "the most amazing thing in this funeral was that what was being buried was still alive... a living folk art."⁶⁹ Where Khmel'nitskii sought to rethink the basic premises of Stalin-era policy, Rempel' staunchly defended them – or, at least, one variation of them, asserting a "particularizing" definition of national artistic culture rooted in Central Asia's pre-revolutionary heritage. He begins with a little parable of his own, intended to demonstrate the fundamental compatibility of socialist content and Central Asian national design: One "grey, rainy autumn" in the 1920s, a rumor had arrived in a rural Uzbek village that Lenin had fallen ill. The master Uzbek wood carver Qodirjon Haydarov responded to this news by crafting a wooden table in Lenin's honor. "He adorned it with national ornamentation," Rempel' writes, "and made an inscription in Arabic script: 'To the director of the revolution, to the leader [*vozhd'*], comrade Lenin – a gift from the laborers of Ferghana.'"⁷⁰ This story could almost serve as a foundational myth for the Stalin-era ideal of the relationship between the national and the international: a national "form" is quite literally inscribed with the message of revolution, Leninism, and class solidarity ("the laborers of Ferghana"). The use of Arabic script is period-appropriate, but Rempel's

⁶⁹ L. Rempel', "Eto ne diskussionno," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, 12 Sep. 1963.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

explicit mention of it seems to be intended to confer a sense of local specificity, authenticity, and, perhaps, exoticism; Lenin's name rendered in Arabic script serves as a bridge linking that which is specifically Central Asian to Soviet socialism. With this anecdote, Rempel' both appeals to an idealized vision of Stalin-era nationalities policy and invokes the specter of Lenin in defense of particularistic Central Asian design and folk art.

In a move typical of earlier Stalin-era discussions, Rempel' relied on vagueness about the content of Central Asian cultural difference and how national art should develop under Soviet power in order to preserve the appearance that his position was uncontroversial and widely agreed upon. He conceded Khmel'nitskii's point that contemporary Central Asian crafts suffered from a number of shortcomings, including "hackwork, incorrectly understood realism (naturalistic embellishment), and eclecticism," but at the same time advocated "developing" and "updating [*obnovlenie*]" Central Asian folk art. What exactly this would mean in the context of the rejection of both naturalism and the "eclectic" hybridization with non-Central Asian art styles is unclear. But on one point he was absolutely firm: whereas Khmel'nitskii proposed that it might be possible to sweep away the remnants of Central Asian design and ornamentation and the Soviet policies that, in his view, artificially prolonged their existence, Rempel' was adamant: "Yes, we are in favor of updating national decorative art, but we are opposed to its annihilation. We affirm the right of folk, national ornamentation to exist and develop [*my utverzhdaem pravo narodnogo, natsional'nogo ornamenta na sushchestvovanie i razvitie*]." His use of the language of a "right to exist" is especially striking; in combination with the linking of the adjectives "folk" and "national," it suggests something that was occasionally hinted at but never explicitly stated within Stalin-era policy – that national folk art and handicrafts were entitlements, that they were in some way guaranteed to the Central Asian population by Soviet nationalities policy, and that this arena of cultural distinctiveness was not only permitted and legitimated under Soviet auspices but also protected.

If for Khmel'nitskii, then, the greatest danger lay in the degradation of aesthetics and the stymied development of Central Asian art, for Rempel' the worst case scenario was that, if the state were to forsake traditional design and ornamentation, the Soviet accommodation of national-ethnic difference in the region itself would suffer a blow. In part, he expresses fears that this would do damage to the propaganda and foreign policy functions of nationalities policy, intended to demonstrate for audiences both at home and abroad the Soviet state's tolerant and anti-colonialist attitude toward non-Russian cultures. "The bourgeois press," Rempel' notes, "intently follows the fate of national cultures in the Soviet Union. It endeavors to prove that the leveling and dying out [*nivelirovka i vymiranie*] of national cultures is taking place in the republics of Central Asia. This is a malicious slander, and it must be debunked by the works of our art specialists. Khmel'nitskii's article hardly serves us well in this regard." But Rempel' also raises a second, less political concern: that to separate Central Asians from their national specificity and heritage would leave them spiritually and culturally deprived, even somehow less fully human. Here he shifts from speaking specifically about Central Asian art to employing an analogy with Russia. On the one hand, he seems to hope that the artistic achievements of Russia's great centers of Soviet-fostered traditional crafts, Palekh and Khokhloma, will be regarded with enough official reverence as to make the abolition of "national ornamentation" there unthinkable; on the other hand, it is possible that he suspects that his strong defense of traditional art and national specificity, carrying the implication of their permanent preservation under Soviet auspices, would sound less radical when applied to Russians than to Central Asians. He warns, "Take away from the modern Russian person his spiritual participation in the inner content of Russian national culture, and you deprive him of his foundation [*pochva*]. Before you will arise something so bloodless that you won't even call it a 'new fashion.'" He does not elaborate on this rather ominous statement any further, but his suggestion that national crafts and ornamentation might serve as an antidote to a cold, deracinated,

“bloodless” modernity prefigures a sentiment that would become increasingly prevalent in discussions during the Brezhnev-era 1970s and 1980s.

The most serious challenge that Khmel'nitskii's article posed to Rempel's point of view, then, was the story of the Tajik collective farmer and the broader question of Central Asian tastes and desires it evoked. On the one hand, Rempel' downplays the significance of the anecdote. The conclusion that the man's renovation plans represented “a rejection of spiritual participation in the inner content of national culture,” Rempel' says, can be chalked up only to Khmel'nitskii's “amazing naiveté.” He reacts more vehemently, though, to the claim that interest in traditional ornamentation had been sustained during the Soviet period purely by a love of “exoticism” among local ethnographers and art historians. “No, this is already beyond naiveté,” he writes, “if folk art is called exoticism, dear only to ethnographers and art historians, and to the people, in the capacity of the ‘national’ (for some reason in quotation marks), neither dear nor necessary.” These quotation marks, and Rempel's affronted reaction to them, are telling, suggesting the fundamental rift in understandings of nationality between the two men. On a more practical level, though, Rempel' is unable to offer much to refute Khmel'nitskii's claim that national ornamentation was losing popularity among the Central Asian population. The rapidity with which he accepts Khmel'nitskii's account of the Tajik kolkhoznik not only as factual but as widely representative, even while strongly disputing his rival's interpretation of it, is striking. It is true that the anecdote accords with a narrative which was exceedingly common in Soviet ethnographic accounts of the 1950s and 1960s and which asserted that Central Asian populations, especially rural ones, showed a dramatically waning interest in “traditional” objects and styles during this period.⁷¹ Whether this concurrence indicates that this narrative was basically accurate, or merely that it was a well-entrenched trope of Soviet discourse at the time, is not entirely clear. But the upshot is that Rempel' felt obliged to

⁷¹ See, for example, A.N. Zhilina, “Sovremennaia material'naia kul'tura sel'skogo naseleniia Tashkentskoi oblasti Uzbeksoi SSR,” in *Material'naia kul'tura narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana*, ed. N.A. Kisliakov and M.G. Vorob'eva (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1966), 121.

offer a solution to the problem that, instead of invoking the desires of Central Asian consumers in defense of his position, makes an end run around them: “The need for folk art should not come out of the budget of the Regarskii kolkhoznik or the tastes of the individual home builder, to which the author refers, but precisely from the new ‘communal life’ [*obshchestvennogo bytiia*], in which folk creation finds its most fertile soil.” In spite of his adamant insistence that national ornamentation was not merely of interest to professional artists and ethnographers in modern Soviet Central Asia, he essentially concedes that it was these professionals, with the support of the Soviet state, who were responsible for perpetuating folk ornament through its use in the adornment of Soviet public buildings. In a pattern that would become increasingly common during the Brezhnev era, artistic professionals positioned themselves as defenders of traditional Central Asian design against the potentially destructive influences of consumer demand – though of course, it is paternalistically implied, always in the interest of the population’s underlying spiritual, cultural, or educative needs.

Yet even so, Rempel’ reacted with puzzlement to Khmel’nitskii’s proposal of an alternative space for the expression of national specificity, to be found in the geometries of locally distinctive architectural layouts rather than in the surface adornments of traditional ornamentation. Ironically, in this realm, where Khmel’nitskii saw the potential for Central Asian traditions to hold continuing relevance, Rempel’ saw something primitive and easily discarded. “Once again, everything is stood on its head,” he remarks sarcastically. “Folk ornamentation, do you see, is outmoded, while structures that are a hundred times more primitive in comparison with the level of modern technology – these remain valuable for us even today. Why?” His bafflement appears to be at least somewhat genuine; in the context of the status quo that had been established over the previous decades of Soviet rule, it had come to be taken for granted that one of the most appropriate spheres for the expression of national difference was aesthetics – color, pattern, and ornamentation – while “modern technology” offered universal functional benefits that were equally applicable to every national culture. Certainly, Khmel’nitskii’s proposal to preserve

the skeletal forms and construction methods of traditional Central Asian architecture but to “strip it bare [*ogolit'*]” of ornamentation represented a significant revision of the most common Soviet understandings of how to apply “national form” to contemporary life. But Rempel' also leverages this difference in interpretation as to the locus of the national in Soviet Central Asian life to attack Khmel'nitskii's ideological credentials. In language that threateningly recalled – almost certainly deliberately – the smear tactics of the late Stalin-era antic cosmopolitan campaign, Rempel' accused Khmel'nitskii of “dogmatically following the theoretical premises of Western architecture and kowtowing [*preklonias'*] before the authority of technical thinking.”⁷² The reduction of architecture to its utilitarian functions, Rempel' argues, not only served to “deny the dignity of national artistic culture,” but also evinced a slavish deference to the theories of architecture then current in the capitalist world.

Rempel's article was so abrasive in its tone and leveled such serious accusations in its substance that the editors of the journal that had published Khmel'nitskii's original piece, *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, felt obliged to respond. The following month, they printed a retort to Rempel's “This is not up for discussion” under the title “The discussion must continue.”⁷³ In part, the article served to affirm the editors' basic agreement with Khmel'nitskii's theoretical position. The rejection of “moribund traditions” which “can be called ‘folk’ only with great reservations” and “were so encouraged during the time of the cult of personality,” they argued, represented not a total rejection of folk art but an attempt to save it by sloughing off elements that were either ideologically undesirable or no longer relevant to contemporary life.⁷⁴ While Rempel's article had acknowledged the problems of “hackwork” and “eclecticism” in Central Asian folk art, the editors said, he had failed to take into account the systemic problems inherent in the approach that had grown entrenched during the Stalin era, which incentivized

⁷² L. Rempel', “Eto ne diskussionno.”

⁷³ “Diskussia dolzhna prodolzhat'sia,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 10, Oct. 1963, 10-11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

tasteless and inauthentic products under the rubric of “folk art.” The “startling facts of overt propaganda for such tastelessness by eminent researchers of Central Asian art” like Rempel’ himself had served to “mislead authentic folk masters, facilitating their transformation into tradesmen [remeslennikov] and eclecticists.” Thus, the editors concluded, “Defending the ‘authority’ [avtoritet] of folk art, L. Rempel’ essentially acts against its return to health.” The “healthy” and suitable way forward for Central Asian folk art, in their view, lay with the path of aesthetic minimalism and functionalism that Khmel’nitskii had briefly set out. Instead of ornamentalism, the essence of Central Asian folk art and national culture could be found “in the wise simplicity and logic of the forms of everyday implements and tools of labor, in the tight connection between ornament and the form, material, and character of an object.”⁷⁵ Once again, they set up a contrast between the false exoticism of “grand, showy things, made for exhibition or for sale to visiting lovers of the national style” – a formulation which again emphasizes the foreign and, perhaps, economically exploitative sources of these exotic tendencies – and the “simple objects of daily life, often completely free of ornamentation, which are the carriers of the real artistic sense and authentic (often, by the way, very ancient, but nevertheless progressive) folk traditions.” Even more explicitly than in Khmel’nitskii’s original article, the editors of *DI SSSR* frame their position not as a constriction of national specificity or a denigration of local cultural traditions, but a more authentic way of melding Central Asianness, and even “ancient” pre-revolutionary tradition, into the products of the Soviet 1960s.

The second major purpose of the editors’ retort to Rempel’, though, was to directly refute his threatening political insinuations. Rempel’s attacks, they said, had framed Khmel’nitskii as “a partisan of capitalism,” “a dogmatic adherent to bourgeois architectural theories,” and “a subverter of the national artistic heritage of the peoples of Central Asia,” and by extension implicated the journal and its staff in

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

these political sins as well.⁷⁶ But in addition to countering Rempel's accusations, the editors turned the tables on him, in a somewhat threatening tone of their own: "If [Khmel'nitskii] nevertheless considers a certain part of this [Central Asian] heritage inappropriate in contemporary architecture, then he is relying *not so much on foreign theorists as on the well-known decisions of the party and government, which directed our architecture onto a new path several years ago.*"⁷⁷ They were referring to a 1955 decree of the Communist Party Central Committee and Council of Ministers of the USSR, which they quoted as condemning architects who "uncritically bring the forms of medieval Eastern architecture into the architecture of contemporary buildings." They additionally cited a speech by Khrushchev at the 22nd party congress in 1961, in which he had allowed for "the use of national color [*natsional'nogo kolorita*] in literature and art" but condemned "instances of archaism" in which "clearly outdated forms, which in no way correspond to the conditions of life and needs of people of our time, are sometimes retrieved out of the darkness of centuries." Citing recent party decrees and speeches by Khrushchev, they presented Rempel' with a perfectly clear reminder that the Soviet state's policy on this issue had changed since "the time of the cult of personality." The protected and in some realms even unassailable status that traditional Central Asian design had achieved locally during the Stalin era was no longer taken for granted, but very much open to question.

Yet ultimately, after presenting evidence that it was in fact Rempel' and not Khmel'nitskii who was out of step with the current party line, the editors of *DI SSSR* ended by attempting to leave the door open for further debate. Rather than declaring the issue decisively resolved by the statements of policy quoted above, the article concluded with the statement, "So, the views of L. Rempel' about folk art and its place in modern culture are far from commonly accepted and indisputable. This is natural. These

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11. Emphasis in original.

are, after all, as we have seen, very complex issues... The discussion on the fate of folk art continues.”⁷⁸ Clearly, the editors’ sympathies lay with Khmel’nitskii and his advocacy for aesthetic modernization and the search for a more ideologically consistent place for Central Asian folk culture within contemporary Soviet society, but they also seemed to presume that there was room for disagreement on these questions within the bounds of Soviet political acceptability. When Rempel’ responded with a letter that backpedaled on some of his more uncompromising positions and disavowed the title of his article – it had originally been “In defense of nationalness [*narodnosti*] in decorative art” and not “This is not up for discussion,” he said –the editors of *DI SSSR* published it in the February 1964 issue of the journal along with a short follow-up piece which sought to find common ground in the debate. They explained that they had felt the need to respond defensively to “the accusations directed at the journal and at the author of the article under discussion, S. Khmel’nitskii,” but laid blame for the acrimonious character of the discussion on the editors of *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, who, they said, had “distorted the text of [Rempel’s] article” and given it the imperious title that had appeared to foreclose the possibility of debate.

On this note, the Khmel’nitskii-Rempel’ exchange effectively ended. But in the same issue of *DI SSSR* as Rempel’s partial retraction and the editors’ final comment, another article was published on the topic of “National décor and modern construction” by S. Khan-Magomedov, which added a third voice to the emerging consensus in opposition to the state’s continued cultivation of traditional ornamental design. Khan-Magomedov explained that a distinction must be drawn between “narrowly national” and “international” characteristics that exist within every national culture. Framing his position in direct opposition to Stalin’s famous claim that it was the most unique and specific features of every nation that would constitute their contribution to the “common treasure-house of world culture,” he wrote: “It seems to us... that in the cultural heritage of each people, the greatest value for the future universal [*obshchechelovecheskoi*] culture is represented not by narrowly national elements, but by those

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

international characteristics which, by virtue of a combination of favorable historical and national conditions, have received their fullest development in the culture of precisely this nation.”⁷⁹ The task of ushering Soviet peoples into the international future thus consisted not in developing the maximal distinctiveness of each national culture, but rather cherry-picking the aspects of those cultures that were already the most progressive, universal, and modern. This would logically lead to cultural convergence (*sblizhenie*), while fostering national uniquenesses could only lead to a situation in which each nation “will be locked into their own ‘specific’ peculiarities,” as had occurred “in the years of the cult of personality.” In a sense, Khan-Magomedov’s article presents the quintessential version of the Khrushchev-era approach to Central Asian national art and culture – relentlessly modernizing, purged of Stalinist ideological deviations, and newly refocused on progress toward a universal socialist future. He even managed to fit in an appeal to the third world, making more explicit the connection that others had already implicitly suggested between tradition-fetishizing exoticism and colonialism: whereas “progressive architects of weakly developed countries” eagerly utilize modern Western construction methods, it is only in “the projects of architects of industrially developed countries which they carry out for the countries of Asia and Africa” that “the aspiration to revive ‘national’ exoticism, including traditional architectural décor,” is found.⁸⁰

In an immediate sense, then, Rempel’ had lost the most ground in his skirmish with Khmel’nitskii. The editors’ references to contemporary party policy had done their work, pushing him into a defensive position and forcing him to cite his other academic works to prove that he was not opposed to modernization and was aware that national culture could not be static, but must evolve in

⁷⁹ S. Khan-Magomedov, “Natsional’nyi dekor i sovremennoe stroitel’stvo,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1964): 23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

step with the “tastes, psychology, and character of people of a socialist society.”⁸¹ But his advocacy of Central Asian artistic tradition did not come to an end, nor was discussion on the place of traditional ornamentation in modern Soviet life decisively closed. In fact, just a few months later, *DI SSSR* hosted another discussion in which the editors invited letters from artists and artistic experts on the question: “What is the role of ornament in modern artistic creation? Is it necessary?” Among the numerous responses, an impassioned reply from Rempel’ was published under the title “Folk ornament is eternal,” evidently a deliberate and unrepentant reference to his position in the debate with Khmel’nitskii.⁸² Even more symptomatic, however, is the fact that while Rempel’ in some ways continued to represent an outlier in this discussion, most of the responses from artistic professionals offered at least a qualified affirmative to the question. The consensus that developed in this discussion suggested a sense of disillusionment with total aesthetic minimalism, as many respondents proposed that “ornament” – to some degree architectural, but even more so in interior décor, furnishings, domestic textiles – might serve as a complement to, or mitigation of, the sparseness and coldness of the modern Khrushchevian interior. Though still muted in 1964, this renewed search for softness, color, and embellishment in interior decoration would prove to be yet another opening into which Central Asian design could step to find a viable role in the Soviet present. In this sense, it was Rempel’s position that proved to be the most lasting. If his unapologetic advocacy for Central Asian national folk art placed him out of step with the ideals and aesthetic principles of the Khrushchev era, many of the ideals he advocated were soon to achieve a new relevance and ascendancy in the nostalgic atmosphere of the Brezhnev-era 1970s.

⁸¹ L. Rempel’, “K diskussii o sud’be natsional’nogo stilia v Srednei Azii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1964): 26.

⁸² L. Rempel’, “Narodnyi ornament bessmertn,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 4 (Apr. 1964), 34-35.

Late Soviet malaise and nostalgia, Central Asian-style: Authenticity, kitsch, and the problem of the consumer, 1970s-1980s

Fully twenty-five years after his article weighing in on the Khmel'nitskii-Rempel' debate in favor of the modernizing and universalizing position, S. Khan-Magomedov wrote a second article on the role of folk art in contemporary life. Retrospectively describing changes in the Soviet approach to traditional folk art over the preceding decades, Khan-Magomedov's 1989 article offers a tidy encapsulation of the extent to which the tide had turned in favor of Central Asian traditional design over the course of the Brezhnev era and beyond. While the 1950s and 1960s had seen the "rejection of 'decorative' tendencies" in favor of the Khrushchev era's minimalistic "new style [*novyi stil'*]," Khan-Magomedov wrote, by the 1970s the consensus had shifted: "Instead of agitation for the 'new style,' critics more and more often began to write about contradictions in its development – about the needless homogenization of the material-spatial environment, about the lack of regard for local traditions, about the modern environment's loss of emotionality and even about its anti-humaneness [*antigumannosti*]." ⁸³ This skepticism toward the Khrushchevian aesthetic seems to have taken root in the author himself as well. If in 1964 he had fretted that "the aspiration to revive narrowly national traditional architectural forms" would leave the Soviet nations "locked into their own 'specific' particularities," by 1989 he was arguing that the "basic shortcoming" of the Khrushchevian style was its "underscoring of the general and universal at the expense of the local and individual." ⁸⁴

Of course, a large part of Khan-Magomedov's newly humanistic and individualistic language can be chalked up to the public discourse of the glasnost era into which he was writing in 1989. But the sea

⁸³ S.O. Khan-Magomedov, "Nekotorye osobennosti stileobrazuiushchikh protsessov v predmetno-khudozhestvennom tvorchestve," *Izdeliia narodnykh khudozhestvennykh promyslov v sovremennom zhilom i obshchestvennom inter'ere: sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institute khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti, 1989), 5.

⁸⁴ Khan-Magomedov, "Natsional'nyi dekor i sovremennoe stroitel'stvo," 22-23; Khan-Magomedov, "Nekotorye osobennosti," 5.

change that he charts in Soviet discourse about folk art over the course of the post-war decades, reaching its zenith during the Brezhnev era, was a real phenomenon. Discussions of folk art and traditional design in the 1970s were permeated by a new tone that blended a sense of alienation from modern life with sentimental nostalgia. The nostalgic turn in late Soviet society has often been discussed as a specifically Russian occurrence, generating a new interest in pre-revolutionary life, the “village prose” movement in literature, and a rising wave of nationalistic sentiment. As Andrew Jenks describes it, Russian nostalgia in the post-war period was “inspired by the Nazi destruction of Russian national monuments, which energized a nascent movement to preserve traditional Russian culture and enhanced a profound sense of cultural loss first piqued by the revolution itself.”⁸⁵ But this mood of nostalgia was far from unique to Russia, and in non-Russian republics like those of Central Asia, it generated expansive new spaces for the exploration of local tradition and the celebration of ethno-cultural distinctiveness.

In the sphere of design and decorative art, the particular cocktail of alienation and nostalgia that characterized the late Soviet period led the attention of artistic professionals away from earlier questions about the desirability of European influence and the proper path toward modernization, instead drawing focus to problems of authenticity, commodification, and kitsch in the realm of folk art. Many of these discussions carried a pessimistic tone that grew out of artistic experts’ sense of revulsion toward the expanding scope of mass production and consumer culture and, correspondingly, their own diminishing professional authority as gatekeepers of artistic quality for the masses. Discussions often revolved around despairing assessments of the proliferation of “hackwork,” the tacky and tasteless objects that were either unthinkingly churned out by Soviet factories or insatiably desired by Soviet

⁸⁵ Andrew Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation in the Brezhnev Era,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 44/4 (Oct.-Dec. 2003): 636. Other major studies of the phenomenon of Brezhnev-era nostalgia, nationalism, and the turn toward the pre-revolutionary past likewise emphasize the specificity of the Russian experience. See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Kathleen Parthé, *Russian village prose: the radiant past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

consumers. At the same time, the question of the gulf between traditional design and the daily lives of contemporary Central Asians was gaining new poignancy. Some art historians and theorists, particularly those dealing with the Russian case, pondered whether any real connection to the artistic past was any longer possible, or whether traditional-style items were doomed to function as little other than incongruous kitsch in modern interiors. But in the Central Asian context, where traditionally ornamented “national goods” had never entirely lost their functionality in daily life, the sense of alienation seems to have been less intense. Instead, the new all-Soviet discourses decrying consumerist emptiness and kitsch were channeled into unabashed defenses of the national and the traditional. Traditional folk art, including Central Asian folk art, was increasingly imagined as an antidote for the sense of deracination and cultural loss that accompanied modern life, and discussions of design posited a newly central place for it within contemporary Soviet society – as a source of beauty, warmth, color, and individualization to counteract the cold and depersonalized world of identical mass-produced objects and indistinguishable concrete apartment blocks. Within this context, traditional Central Asian design was vindicated not in its capacity as infinitely flexible national “form,” but precisely because it was assumed to carry with it a particular set of affective meanings and cultural resonances.

Sources of inauthenticity in design: Stylization, eclecticism, conveyerization, souvenirization.

Although written under the mundane title “The role of folk artistic crafts in modern life and the specificities of their production and distribution through the trade network,” a 1972 report by a specialist on Russian folk art for the Research Institute on Folk Artistic Crafts (NIIKhP) in fact amounted to a resolutely dystopian screed against modern life. If this seems an incongruous marriage of message and medium, it is nevertheless symptomatic of the way that discussions about folk art in the 1970s had become invested with the full weight of questions of national culture, authenticity, and even, as Rempel’ had earlier implied, the spiritual grounding of a person under modern conditions. The author, N.V. Voronov, outlined his pessimistic vision – prudently specified as modern and industrial rather than

specifically Soviet, with Los Angeles named as one of its primary exemplars – with imagery of cancer-ridden cities clogged with automobiles, people deprived of “sun, air, clean water, health,” the hyper-organization and “massivization” (*massovizatsiia*) of daily life, and a pervasive “ideology of conformism.”⁸⁶ A constituent part of this hellish landscape was the elimination of hand-created works of folk art, which bear “the imprint of the ‘soul’ of a person,” and their replacement with mass-produced objects, “mechanically created and mechanically reproduced works with millions of identical copies.”⁸⁷

Many artistic experts throughout the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union shared Voronov’s alarm at the growing spiritual emptiness and inauthenticity that, in their view, plagued both modern daily life and contemporary Soviet design, but the diagnoses they offered for the source of this ailment were varied, and the solutions they proposed were, characteristically for such discussions, often contradictory. Some experts on Central Asian art traced the source of inauthenticity to the root issue of nationality and national cultures. But here the problem might be identified either as “stylization” (*stilizatsiia*), implying too heavy a reliance on national particularism, or as “eclecticism” (*eklektika*), suggesting clumsy attempts to blend European and Central Asian styles. Other experts located the source of inauthenticity in contemporary mass culture and consumerism, which was said to generate two interrelated but distinct problems: the mechanization and mass production of crafts that were formerly produced by hand, disparagingly termed “conveyerization,” and the treacherous effects on artistic quality of consumer demand itself.

The competing fears of “stylization” and “eclecticism” drew on old debates about the appropriate content of national cultures under the Soviet system. Although both terms could be used rather flexibly, during the late Soviet period “stylization” most often meant the (kitschy) imitation of ostensibly traditional or folk styles in contemporary architecture and décor, while “eclecticism” usually

⁸⁶ GARF A-643, Op. 2, d. 99, 33-37.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

meant the (kitschy) blending together of various national styles. In a sense, the two terms served as the newest variation on the Europeanizing-particularizing division that had existed, in one form or another, since the Stalin era. “Stylization” was a term of reproach utilized by advocates of artistic modernization who insisted that art and design must evolve in step with the changing lives and tastes of Soviet people. As Khan-Magomedov explained in his 1964 article in *DI SSSR*, the practice of stylization necessarily produced a feeling of disconnect and alienation because it involved the artificial transplantation of a historical style into the modern period. Soviet proponents of pre-revolutionary design had forgotten, he wrote, that “the viewer evaluates differently even the purely artistic achievements of an architectural monument and its modern copy, which does not evoke [the same] numerous historical associations.”⁸⁸ Deprived of its historical context and specific meaning, the traditional art form became pure surface-level “style,” lacking any authentic resonance with the contemporary viewer. Voronov took aim at this phenomenon in the Russian context as well: “All pre-revolutionary folk art was in accordance with its time, consonant with it and changing together with it. But today? Today it is almost entirely built on reproduction, on counterfeiting antiquity.”⁸⁹ Imitation, simulacrum, and a certain theatricality were the defining characteristics of stylization, with one Soviet theorist going so far as to argue that traditional-style objects could only serve as theatrical “props” in the modern interior, standing in incongruous juxtaposition to “real elements of the architectural space.”⁹⁰

Conversely, “eclecticism” was decried by advocates of local artistic traditions who objected to attempts to, in their view, artificially graft external influences onto traditional artistic cultures, including Central Asian folk art. Even during the Khrushchev era, as its use in the Khmel’nitskii-Rempel’ debate shows, the term had begun to shift from an earlier and more general meaning, indicating the tasteless

⁸⁸ S. Khan-Magomedov, “Natsional’nyi dekor i sovremennoe stroitel’stvo,” 22-23.

⁸⁹ GARF A-643, Op. 2, d. 99, 152-153.

⁹⁰ I. Riumina, “Iskrennost’ i fal’sh’ stilizatsii,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 4 (Apr. 1973), 14.

merging of mismatched artistic forms or styles, to be used as a more specific code for the undesirable mixing of different *national* styles. This can be understood as a more assertive development of the “particularizing” strain of Soviet thinking on national cultures, in which not only the elimination of local styles but even their ostensibly “internationalist” blending with other styles was framed as incorrect and damaging, both aesthetically and culturally. As early as 1959, one expert’s evaluation of an exhibition of Uzbek folk art criticized “the uncritical replication of the form, ornament, and color arrangement of works of Kazakhstan’s ceramicists who, in turn, have imitated a great deal from the ceramicists of Ukraine.”⁹¹ The speaker went on to draw a polar contrast between the “authentic folk ceramics of Uzbekistan” and “creation on a foreign [*chuzhenarodnoi*] basis.” In this formulation, authenticity was equated with origins in the local culture, and borrowing stylistic elements from foreign (including other Soviet) peoples was by definition inauthentic. The rejection of “eclecticism” became an officially acceptable way for artistic professionals to push back against the impulses within Soviet nationalities thinking toward cross-cultural borrowing and blending. It was thus possible for another art historian to complain that Uzbek ceramics “is losing its national, local coloring... It takes something from Ukraine, there is eclecticism,” or for a Soviet text on Central Asian decorative art to warn of “the pollution of the formal structure of traditional art with alien, eclectic phenomena.”⁹² If the discourse of stylization warned of the loss of authenticity through the ossification of the national, the discourse of eclecticism warned precisely of its “pollution” with external influences.

Yet what is especially novel in the discussions of the Brezhnev era and afterward, in contrast to earlier renditions of modern/traditional and international/local debates, is the extent to which the question of authenticity was pitched not at an academic or ethnographic level, but instead an affective and personal one. In part, this was an effect of a growing awareness of the personalistic dimensions of

⁹¹ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 571, 8.

⁹² TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 441, 331; A.A. Khakimov, *Sovremennoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo respublik Srednei Azii: k probleme traditsii i novatorstva* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo “Fan” UzSSR, 1988), 33.

consumer culture among artistic experts during these years, when consumer demand was receiving heightened attention in Soviet rhetoric and economic planning.⁹³ It was no longer sufficient, as it had been for Khmel'nitskii, to identify the phenomenon of stylization within the practices of Soviet artistic institutions; it was now necessary to explain why "tasteless" imitations of traditional folk art were so popular among consumers. A 1973 article titled "Sincerity and the falsity of stylization," though harshly critical of Russian consumers who cluttered their homes with purposeless traditional-style knick-knacks, nevertheless connected this practice to a sense of "emotional hunger" deriving from the dearth of individuality, warmth, and color in contemporary Soviet architecture and urban life.⁹⁴ The author extended this hunger for differentiation, the desire to "individualize the typical," to nationality as well: "Aren't the various interiors decorated in archaic national style, where completely new materials are meant to be covered in a 'patina' for the sake of maintaining local exoticism, a reaction to the homogeneity of buildings among all the republics?" Of course, the article explains, the kind of ethnic pastiche produced by stylization could never succeed in fulfilling these emotional needs. But its flaw lay not in its strained connection to historical models of folk art or its divergence from the idealized life of a Soviet person, but in the subjective sensation of inauthenticity it evoked: the "simultaneous trust and mistrust, appeal and alienation" characteristic of objects of kitsch.

Expressions of a special horror of kitsch, of cheapness, tastelessness, shallow pretensions to artistic quality, and sentimentality, were perpetual features of artistic professionals' laments about the effects of mass production and mass culture on folk art. Processes of "conveyerization" and the growth of a specific kind of mass consumer demand, they said, threatened to break the linkage between "folk applied art" and "high art" that Soviet rhetoric had cultivated over the previous decades, transforming

⁹³ Notably, in 1966 the first all-union Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand was established to conduct periodic consumer surveys and aggregate data about consumer purchasing habits, with branches in each of the union republics, including those of Central Asia. The archives for the Kyrgyz and Uzbek branches may be found at TsGA KR, F. 1576 and TsGA RUz F. 2750 respectively.

⁹⁴ I. Riumina, "Iskrennost' i fal'sh' stilizatsii," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 4 (Apr. 1973): 11-12.

folk crafts into interchangeable factory-produced baubles rather than emblems of Soviet national cultures or instruments for the cultural elevation of the populace. Part of the blame was laid at the feet of Soviet institutions and the state's production policy, which churned out inexpensive mass-produced items "resembling one another like twins," leading traditional-style objects to "lose their uniqueness, originality, warmth, and appeal for the buyer."⁹⁵ In Kyrgyzstan, a representative of local industry complained, "so-called *ala-kiyiz* come off of an assembly line," producing identical products with no individual character and leading to an institutional tendency to over-simplify traditionally complex ornamental designs.⁹⁶ The introduction of mechanization and the conveyer method into the production of folk objects, artistic experts said, came at the expense of artistic quality, but also of the human connection that was supposedly forged between artist and consumer in the case of a hand-made, unique object. At a 1977 all-union conference, the chairman of the Union of Artists of the USSR explained, "As everyone knows, the tendency toward mechanization in the production of artistic items contradicts the nature of creative artistic labor." He expressed extravagant disgust at the industrial production of Khokhloma-style spoons "stamped out of plastic," exclaiming, "These spoons elicit horror with their mechanical lifelessness."⁹⁷ Apart from producing such aesthetic revulsion, the products of mechanized mass production constituted competition for and undercut the prices of work done by hand and even, some professionals argued, served to "ruin" or "disorient" the tastes of consumers purely by virtue of their mass availability.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ A.A. Khakimov, *Sovremennoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo respublik Srednei Azii: k probleme traditsii i novatorstva* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo "Fan" UzSSR, 1988), 34; *Narodnye khudozhestvennye promysly severnogo Kavkaza: traditsii i sovremennost'*. *Sbornik statei*, ed. D.M. Magomedov (Makhachkala: Dagestanskii filial AN SSSR, 1988), 29.

⁹⁶ *Stenogramma Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po problemam razvitiia sovremennogo narodnogo iskusstva v svete postanovleniia TsK KPSS "O narodnykh khudozhestvennykh promyslakh."* Moscow: 1977, 241-242, 244.

⁹⁷ *Stenogramma Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii*, 11.

⁹⁸ *Narodnye khudozhestvennye promysly severnogo Kavkaza*, 30; Khakimov, *Sovremennoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo*, 37.

Consumers were not always framed as the hapless victims of kitsch, however; they could also be branded as its perpetrators. Rather than buying artisanal wood-block printed textiles to hang on their walls, Tashkent consumers were accused in 1959 of opting for “carpets with sentimental images, Eastern concubines, swimming swans, usually on a backdrop of a medieval castle or the most bizarre architecture.”⁹⁹ By 1988, if consumer preferences had shifted somewhat, they nevertheless remained anathema to defenders of folk art: carpets hung in Kazakh homes were decorated not with traditional geometric ornamentation, but images of swans, tigers, and poppies, and “in Ferghana, Samarkand, and Jizzak oblasts, in the homes of rural women, many of them descendants of skilled embroiderers, one encounters towels or small wall-hangings embroidered with images of heroes from Indian films.”¹⁰⁰

The fear that the previously sacrosanct sphere of folk artistic crafts had been tainted by mass production and consumer demand was encapsulated in the term “souvenirization.” The category of “souvenirs” had long occupied an ambiguous position within Soviet production policy and discourse. From the earliest decades of Soviet interest in folk crafts, policies mandating the production of Central Asian national goods within Soviet institutions had also typically included provisions for the production of “souvenir items” reflecting local distinctiveness; the categories were conceptually distinct, but conjoined to the extent that even local officials frequently had difficulty in telling them apart.¹⁰¹ In a theoretical sense, the distinction seems to have been between objects with an organic, often functional connection to the daily life of their possessors, which constituted “applied art,” and objects with a purely commemorative function and meant solely for display, which constituted “souvenirs.” Objects classified as souvenirs tended to be, by design, less true to folk traditions, subject to less stringent

⁹⁹ TsGA RUz F. 2320, Op. 1, d. 571, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Khakimov, *Sovremennoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo*, 34.

¹⁰¹ When the Kyrgyz SSR’s enterprises were instructed to provide samples of locally-produced souvenirs for an exhibition organized by the USSR Ministry of Trade in 1967, they included two models of Kyrgyz kalpaks (traditional peaked caps), which were rejected by the exhibition commission because they “do not belong to [the category of] souvenirs.” TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 95, 367.

aesthetic standards, and often more cheaply produced than objects properly classified as “folk art.” To give one example of this distinction, a 1956 decree of the Council of Ministers of the Kyrgyz SSR ordered, alongside “national clothing” and “artistic goods” intended for consumption by the local population, the production of “souvenirs representing the culture, daily life, flora and fauna, as well as national specificities, historical and architectural monuments, and landmarks of the republic,” including items such as cigarette holders, cosmetics cases, and photographic albums.¹⁰² In another case, an Uzbek factory in the city of Khiva was instructed to produce “folk crafts” like ceramic dishware painted with national ornamentation alongside “souvenir scarves with images of the architectural monuments of Khiva.”¹⁰³ To the extent that souvenirs were understood as blatantly commercial products and freed from requirements of either cultural authenticity or didactic influence on the consumer, souvenir design comfortably accepted artificiality, incongruity, and a token or exoticized approach to local cultural markers in a way that the design of “folk artistic crafts” did not.

When Soviet artistic experts used “souvenirization” as a term of abuse during this period, then, they were frequently intending to cordon off the souvenir’s cheapness, tackiness, artificiality, and alienation from the category of “authentic folk art.” The souvenir, according to one 1970 analysis, represented pure stylization, a crystallization of the incongruity and temporal disconnect that haunted attempts to transplant traditional styles into modern interiors: “The time of the souvenir is distinct from our, real time... This contradiction – between the space of the subject and the time of the object – finds its resolution, in part, in stylization.”¹⁰⁴ The implied connection between souvenirs and foreign consumers made it easier for professionals to discard aesthetic concerns altogether; as the chairman of a 1979-1980 exhibition committee for folk crafts bluntly put it, “If in folk artistic crafts... there still stands

¹⁰² TsGA KR F. 313, Op. 5, d. 260, 117-118.

¹⁰³ TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 244, 68.

¹⁰⁴ L. Novikova, “Znakovaia funktsiia suvenira,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 1 (1970): 33.

the problem of preserving the traditions of folk art, in souvenir production this problem does not exist. There, as much – excuse the expression – stereotypical nonsense [*razvesistoi kliukvy*] as possible is permissible, so that foreigners will buy these souvenirs.”¹⁰⁵ What is more notable, though, is that some commentators proposed that even *local* consumer demand could be sloughed off from folk art onto souvenir production. One art historian’s response to N. Voronov’s pessimistic assessment of the contemporary state of Russian folk art went so far as to claim that while souvenir production must be beholden to the whims of consumer culture, folk art could and should circumvent consumer demand entirely: “Art cannot develop when it descends to the level of the masses. It inevitably degenerates into tastelessness and hackwork... Mass demand must be satisfied by the souvenir industry, and not by folk crafts.”¹⁰⁶ On one level, the creeping disdain for Central Asian consumers and consumer demand among (primarily ethnically non-Central Asian) artistic experts again underscores the paternalism and quasi-colonial hierarchies inherent in many Soviet efforts at cultural preservation. It represented, in particular, the continued power of people other than Central Asians themselves to define the parameters of “national culture.” But paradoxically, the professional hand-wringing over inauthenticity and consumerist decay also created new openings for local participation in the interpretation of national cultures, extending beyond the narrow confines of Soviet artistic and cultural institutions. By defending a sharp boundary between “souvenirs” and “folk crafts,” artistic professionals sought to reclaim a space for traditional-style objects that was untouched by what they saw as the debasing and alienating effects of modern life, industrial mass production, and consumer culture – including in their Soviet variants. Their vindication of local tradition and particularism thus served to partially dislodge modernization,

¹⁰⁵ *Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia pervoi Vsesoiuznoi vystavki proizvedenii masterov narodnykh khudozhestvennykh promyslov, organizovannoi sogalsno postanovleniiu TsK KPSS “O narodnykh khudozhestvennykh promyslakh” v 1979-1980 gg.* (Moscow: Ministerstvo Kul'tury SSSR, 1983), 178.

¹⁰⁶ GARF F. A-643, Op. 2, d. 99, 18.

mechanization, and homogeneity as unassailable Soviet aesthetic and ideological values, generating new opportunities for the articulation of alternative ones.

“Mass in use, but unique in character”: Authenticity for folk crafts in a consumer society.

Discussions about folk art during the last decades of Soviet rule tended toward a defense of traditional artistic styles and hand-craftsmanship as an antidote to the harmful symptoms of modern disaffection and deracination. On the one hand, pre-revolutionary traditions of craftsmanship, design, and ornamentation would, it was hoped, serve as a counterpoint to the proliferation of mass-produced kitsch and “hackwork” under modern conditions, offering consumers a product that was both populist and representative of high culture. The ideal, as Uzbek design expert D.A. Fakhretdinova wrote in 1972, was for Central Asian folk art to produce works that were “mass in use, but unique in character” – accessible to all consumers thanks to the scale of Soviet production and the mechanization of auxiliary production processes, but maintaining the special imprint of design and hand-work by a skilled master.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, advocates increasingly emphasized the special subjective appeal that works of folk art were believed to naturally possess for consumers. The NIIKhP had carried out an exhibition on the use of Russian folk crafts in modern apartments in 1961 and arrived at the conclusion that “items of artistic crafts placed in residential rooms lend them the national color and warmth of precisely the Russian interior, without sacrificing its democraticness.” Russian folk items like textiles, ceramics, and carved wooden dishware “proved to be not only possible, but also necessary and desirable in the modern residential home,” contrasting both with the “showy luxury of bourgeois prosperity” and the “soulless technologism characteristic of the decadent tendencies in the contemporary art of the West.”¹⁰⁸ A representative of the Union of Architects of the Georgian SSR came to a similar conclusion at a conference on interior decoration in Tbilisi in 1970, proposing “decorative

¹⁰⁷ D.A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativnoe-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo literatury i iskusstva im. Garfura Guliyama, 1972): 93.

¹⁰⁸ GARF F. A-643, Op. 2, d. 24, 7, 56.

elements and objects of national art” as the antidote to the omnipresent “dryness,” “uniformity” and “lack of comfort” in contemporary industrial home construction.¹⁰⁹ The tropes of vividness and intimacy permeated Central Asian discussions of folk artistic crafts as well, as in a 1963 article advocating a special place for traditional-style Uzbek fabrics in contemporary interior design: “Bright Uzbek fabrics, in the form of curtains, sofa cushions, tablecloths, and in certain circumstances even furniture, artistically enrich the interior, bringing to it warmth and color.”¹¹⁰

In the Russian case, optimism about finding a new place for peasant crafts in the modern interior was often tempered by ambivalence, centering on the dangers of incongruity and kitschiness. Discussions about Russian crafts continued to foreground the problem of stylization and the gulf between traditional objects and contemporary daily life. Even while arguing that Russian folk art “stands in contrast to modern Western mass culture as art of a pure and clear moral ideal,” Voronov concluded that such art could only be embraced in contemporary life with a sense of self-awareness and even ironic distance, accepting “stylization” as “the logically inescapable path” and pursuing it “lightly, frankly, theatrically, with a smile.”¹¹¹ By contrast, this mood of disconnection and ironic self-awareness was largely absent from discussions of folk crafts within Brezhnev-era Central Asia, where the praise for folk art was less qualified, at times serving as little other than a triumphant affirmation of the national and traditional. For reasons that are not entirely clear, by the 1970s, Central Asian traditional crafts were typically painted as less afflicted by the modernist malaise and more effortlessly authentic than those in Russia during the same period. A 1972 article (penned, it should be noted, by an ethnic non-Central Asian) made this argument explicitly, praising Central Asian crafts for “the age-old, natural, not contrived or showy – for the sake of tourists – integration of the majority of these items into the daily

¹⁰⁹ “Khudozhestvennyi stil' sovremennykh inter'erov: Zametki s soveshchaniia arkhitektorov,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1970): 9-10.

¹¹⁰ S. Makhkamova, “Uzbekskie tkani segodnia,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1963): 34.

¹¹¹ GARF F. A-642, Op. 2, d. 99, 49, 153.

order of life, customs, and mores.”¹¹² The author attributed this distinction to the fact that in Central Asia, folk crafts were not isolated decorative trinkets, but existed on a continuum that also included the wide array of other traditional-style consumer objects that I have been referring to as “national goods”: “Far from degenerating into souvenir trinkets and trivialities, [folk crafts] remain essential, in a place where people still wear the national costume, where they live in traditionally furnished homes, and where they will not for anything give up the cuisine to which they have been accustomed since childhood.” In this view, Central Asian crafts escaped the fate of souvenirization and kitschification in part because they were able to retain an integral and organic connection to the lives of their possessors, because they were components of a living, cohesive national material culture rather than one that had been relegated to the past.

Indeed, it was common for the late Soviet press to assert that Central Asian artistic crafts occupied a uniquely central and intimate place in the lives of the region’s inhabitants, enjoying both enduring utilitarian significance and a special popular affection among consumers – two elements of the “authenticity” that Khmel’nitskii and other critics had worried was dwindling over time. Already at a 1956 meeting of the Uzbek artistic goods producer’s union, an academic from the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences had offered an anecdote that suggested a special affective relationship between traditional-style crafts and Central Asian consumers. “When I was at a bazaar in Bukhara,” she recalled, “a local resident bought himself a clay [national] *kosa* for 60 rubles. There was also a Chinese bowl for 60 rubles... I asked, ‘Why did you buy that [Uzbek] one?’ He said, ‘Eating from this *kosa* is more delicious.’”¹¹³ The naturalization and valorization of the connection between Central Asian peoples and their locally specific, traditional-style objects and styles, implied to be innate and essential, recalls Rozvadovskii’s defense of national art at the 1937 Uzbek exhibition.

¹¹² B. Viaz’min, “Dekorativnoe iskusstvo Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 10 (Oct. 1972): 7.

¹¹³ TsGA RUz F. 2329, Op. 1, d. 441, 331.

Over the course of the Brezhnev era, this discourse grew more powerful and pervasive, arguably becoming the dominant way of discussing folk crafts in the region. On the occasion of the Central Committee's 1975 decree affirming and expanding artistic crafts production throughout the Soviet Union, an article in the Uzbek-language women's journal *Saodat* offered a paean to local handicrafts that emphasized both their utility and their intimate emotional significance:

As soon as a person comes into the world, he is surrounded by examples of folk applied art. A *ko'rpa* stitched with the threads of love, a *palak* [embroidered wall hanging] blooming with the song of a mother's soul, a *beshtik* as warm as a mother's embrace, a doll providing a little girl with enjoyment, a *do'ppi* "made from threads of gold" on a child's head, a *bekasab* robe hung on a peg, the flowers embellishing the house's façade – all of these are examples of folk applied decorative art.¹¹⁴

This newly ascendant strain in discussions of Central Asian art during the Brezhnev period evidently drew on – and mirrored – the feelings of nostalgia and renewed interest in the pre-revolutionary past and the nation that were taking hold of Russia during the same time. Nevertheless, this Central Asian brand of nostalgia not only put forward a strong defense of local ethno-cultural specificity, but also presented the unique virtues of Central Asian artistic crafts – joyful color and ornament, richness, intimacy, authenticity – as particularly potent correctives to the malaise of late 20th-century (Soviet) modernity.

Accordingly, artistic specialists increasingly portrayed the aesthetic qualities of Central Asian crafts as simultaneously "ancient" and fully compatible with and integrated into contemporary life in the region. A 1971 photo essay in the Uzbek women's journal *Saodat* showcased the varied artisanal production of the village of Urgut: earthenware dishes, elaborately painted wooden chests (*sandiq*), woven carpets, and gold-embroidered wall-hangings (*so'zana*). Far from being downplayed, the connection with the pre-revolutionary past was made central, with the text emphasizing the age-old skill

¹¹⁴ Tilab Mahmudov, "Xalq san'ati – xalq ziynati," *Saodat* no. 9 (Sep. 1975): 18.

and knowledge which the families of Urgut had “passed from generation to generation.”¹¹⁵ A report of the Ministry of Light Industry on the production of traditional-style crafts in Kyrgyzstan observed that the decoratively ornamented *chiy* mat “occupies a special place among the various objects of Kyrgyz daily life for its richness of ornamentation and color”; the “joyful coloring” and “deep ancientness [*glubokoi drevnosti*]” of this type of art was mentioned not as a counterpoint to this modern relevance, but rather as an affirmation of it.¹¹⁶ Writing in 1972 about the history of Uzbek cloth production under Soviet auspices, D.A. Fakhretdinova similarly observed a moment of convergence between the deeply historical and the modern in Central Asia of the 1950s: “From the depths of centuries surfaced a traditional color combination of extraordinary freshness and nobility: white, turquoise, and violet. It had been forgotten for decades, and the modern generation took it not as traditional, but as fashionable.”¹¹⁷ The concern with introducing either “socialist content” or Europeanized modernity almost completely falls away in this discourse, supplanted by an assertion of basic compatibilities between modern Soviet life and pre-revolutionary Central Asian tastes and practices. The decoupling of modernity from Europeanization, and the implicit possibility of imagining a particularistic Central Asian brand of modernity, would be further explored in the local-language press and in popular consumer practice during the late Soviet period, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 5. But within professional artistic discourse, the ability of Central Asian folk crafts to serve simultaneously as an antithesis to hyper-industrialized capitalism and culturally uprooted consumerism earned them a status as inherently socialist. The “national” essence of these objects was envisioned not as a counterpoint to their socialist content but as its primary vehicle.

¹¹⁵ B. Mizroxin, “Urgutda Hamisha Bahor,” *Saodat* no. 10 (Oct. 1971).

¹¹⁶ TsGA KR F. 1528, Op. 16, d. 106, 60.

¹¹⁷ Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativnoe-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana*, 109.

Conclusion

Like the policy trajectories described in Chapter 1, the broad pattern of discourses on national culture among artistic professionals – a set of basic disagreements within Soviet nationalities thinking culminating in a shift, fueled by unease about consumerism and industrial modernity, toward a strong affirmation of national specificity – appear to have represented Soviet Union-wide phenomena that nonetheless were felt especially pointedly in the Central Asian case. There, questions about the development of folk art intersected with the legacies of Central Asian “backwardness” and larger ambivalences about the place of ethno-cultural difference in Soviet life in the long term. From the distinct, if often muted, polarization of the “Europeanizing” and “particularizing” approaches to Central Asian folk art during the Stalin era, discussions among artistic professionals had tilted strongly in the direction of a defense of Central Asian artistic distinctiveness by the end of the 1970s. While specialists on Russian folk art grappled anxiously with questions about the continued viability of peasant art forms and traditions, Central Asian specialists, and increasingly the local-language press as well, took up and ran with the nostalgic rhetoric of their Russian counterparts, producing an effusive celebration of the warmth, color, beauty, and intimacy of national cultural traditions. The Stalin-era dichotomy between “national form” and “socialist content” all but dissolved, supplanted by a confident assertion that the nationally particularistic and the modern, Soviet, and socialist were at least broadly compatible, if not directly overlapping.

If folk art occupied a somewhat unique and privileged place within Soviet thinking, the strong defense of national specificity offered in its name nonetheless bled over into an authorization for particularist currents in discussions of consumer behavior and everyday life as well. Aside from their most immediate effect in setting the agenda for Soviet designers and producers of Central Asian-style crafts, then, these discussions of folk art laid the foundations for a discourse that extrapolated a right to cultural integrity and cultural difference, in both its emotive and mundane dimensions, from the letter

of Soviet nationalities policy. Artistic vindications of Central Asian national cultures wedged open a certain possibility space for defenses of traditionalism, for the preservation not only of traditional objects but also of the traditional values with which they were associated, even for positing Central Asianness as an antidote to the ills of Soviet modernity. Yet the vindication of Central Asian folk art did not completely eliminate more restrictive, and at times Russianizing or Europeanizing, visions of how to be a good, modern Soviet Central Asian consumer. Nor did Soviet production policy and discourses on national art and culture provide a clear path for Central Asian consumers who sought to navigate among the wide array of new identifications – as a cosmopolitan and fashionable, restrained and tasteful, humble and authentic – made possible by the variety of available goods. On the contrary, the expanding the horizons of consumer choice also made consumer decision-making more fraught and littered with potential pitfalls. The next chapter will shift focus to the advice for consumers that proliferated in the Central Asian-language press in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, where the tense push and pull between “Europeanizing” tendencies toward homogenization and “particularizing” tendencies toward ethno-cultural difference became a subject of dispute among the ethnically Central Asian intelligentsia themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

Crafting the Soviet Central Asian Consumer: Fashion, Culturedness, and Taste in Post-Stalin Central Asia, 1955-1985

In the decades after World War II, in Central Asia as in Russia, the Soviet press devoted considerable attention to printing advice for consumers touching on the minutiae of domestic life, dress, décor, and personal taste. A steady stream of articles, published chiefly in Soviet women's journals between the 1950s and the 1980s, sought to set out a distinction between proper and improper consumption habits and to inculcate readers with the qualities of a modern, conscientious Soviet consumer: practicality, restraint, culturedness, and good taste. But although efforts to shape consumer behavior motivated the press throughout the Soviet Union, in Central Asia's local-language press such discussions intersected with and were complicated by all of the questions of ethnic distinctiveness, national self-expression, and locally specific material culture that had been raised in the course of the preceding decades. The availability of both national-style and European-style goods for purchase in Soviet shops meant that Central Asian consumers were faced with choices about what to buy, wear, and use that spoke not only to personal taste, but also to ethnic identities and cultural allegiances. Moreover, the deep ambivalences within Soviet thinking about the relationship between national specificity and socialist modernity meant that there was never one method for balancing between the consumption of national and European goods that could be counted on to meet with unequivocal official and professional approval. Central Asian consumers were expected not only to avoid excess, poor taste, and "philistinism" in their consumption decisions, like their Russian counterparts, but also to tread the thin line between consuming national-style goods in a "Soviet" way and appearing excessively backward and provincial. The Central Asian press sought to bridge this gap by offering extensive and meticulous guidance to local readers, detailing not merely whether consumers ought to purchase

certain types of goods, whether national or European in style, but in what proportions and combinations they should be bought and how exactly they ought to be displayed or utilized.

The dominant voices in the press discussions of appropriate consumer behavior were those of professional architects, artists, designers, and other members of the Soviet intelligentsia. But in contrast to the pattern we have seen in the previous chapters, most of the writers of these articles were themselves ethnically Uzbek or Kyrgyz. Their views, to be clear, were published in local-language journals which were at least nominally mouthpieces of the Communist Party and Soviet government in the region. The Uzbek-language women's journal *Saodat*, for example, identified itself on its title page as an "organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan." The journals' contributors were themselves either members in good standing of their corresponding state-regulated professional unions (the Union of Architects, Union of Artists, Union of Writers, and so on) or employees of local governmental bodies, state ministries, or economic institutions. Such credentials were typically listed in the bylines of the journal articles, imparting the writers' words with the weight of official authority. Nevertheless, the experiences and concerns they referenced in these discussions were distinctively local, and the advice they offered was neither lifted from an official Moscow document nor imported wholesale from the Russian-language press. In short, the consumer advice printed in Central Asian-language journals was generated predominantly by ethnically Central Asian authors, but it shared its origins as well as much of its vocabulary and underlying premises with the discussions of consumption that were occurring in Soviet Russia at around the same time. Through the medium of the local-language press, the Central Asian intelligentsia joined policy-makers and art historians in the task of working out an acceptable place for Central Asian objects in contemporary life and searching for compatibilities between Central Asian ethnic distinctiveness and socialist modernity.

In keeping with Soviet thinking that framed consumer choice as a public concern, both an indicator of individual moral fiber and a matter of social responsibility, the consumer advice published in

the Central Asian press tended to be heavy-handedly didactic and morally charged. It overlaid the variety of Central Asian-style and European-style objects available for purchase through Soviet institutions with a discourse that designated some ways of consuming these objects as cultured, tasteful, and Soviet while condemning others as backward, philistine, and bourgeois. Strikingly, in contrast to the growing legitimization of Central Asian difference in other discursive registers during the post-war period, many writers for the local-language press drew the distinction between proper and improper consumption along European-Central Asian and modern-traditional lines. Even articles penned by ethnic Central Asians quite often freely deployed a quasi-colonial rhetoric of backwardness, ignorance, and poor hygiene to stigmatize undesirable local practices or objects and urge the adoption of more “modern” European ones. Nevertheless, while a handful of Central Asian objects were consistently decried as “backward” within this local-language Soviet discourse, and still more were subject to onerous rules about appropriate use, others came to be normalized as acceptable and even desirable elements of national self-expression. Alongside articles pressuring consumers to limit or entirely replace the use of national-style goods, some writers explored ways of integrating individual Central Asian objects into modern tableaux or of arranging numerous Central Asian-style objects in accordance with principles like neatness, restraint, and harmony between form and function that were endorsed as modern and “tasteful” by Soviet experts.

Even beyond offering specific allowances for Central Asian difference in material culture and domestic life, these discussions of appropriate consumer behavior also folded distinctively local concerns and values into their argumentation. Moral arguments about appropriate consumption habits, which were addressed overwhelmingly to women, drew copiously on assumptions about women’s domestic obligations – obligations to care for children, to maintain a home supporting the well-being of the family and the proper reception of guests, to dress modestly and in accordance with community standards – which, while not unique to Central Asia, gained their authority as much from local

community expectations as from Soviet rhetoric. By the same token, articles in the local press gave weight to Soviet buzzwords like “culturedness,” “hygiene,” and “taste” by reframing them in terms of Central Asian daily life – the necessary number of dishes for receiving guests for tea, the proper arrangement of the household courtyard [Uzb. *hovli*] to maintain sanitary conditions, the difficulties arising from the collision between local requirements of female modesty and the demands of urban fashion.

On one level, then, the local-language Soviet press represented an important conduit by which seemingly rote, formulaic elements of Soviet rhetoric could meaningfully enter into the Central Asian social milieu and, eventually, even into the conversations of individual Central Asians, as we shall see in Chapter 5. But the deployment of familiar imagery, local social pressures, and culturally resonant moral obligations did not merely serve to make Soviet ideals more palatable to a Central Asian audience and facilitate their acceptance; rather, it fundamentally changed their content. First, the additive effect of the pressures that both Soviet discourse and local society placed on women as consumers and as objects of social concern meant that women’s fashion choices and roles within the family were subject to redoubled scrutiny and tightened strictures within the Central Asian context. Second, the key role that ethnically Central Asian members of the Soviet intelligentsia played in laying out the parameters of modern, cultured behavior for a local audience reflected and reinforced divisions between urban and rural, intelligentsia and non-intelligentsia, more and less Russian-influenced Central Asian populations in the region. Finally, rhetoric that seamlessly blended appeals to Soviet values with appeals to local norms gave shape to a public discourse, manifested in the local-language press, in which Sovietness and Central Asianness were presented not only as compatible but even as mutually reinforcing in certain ways. The counterintuitive uses to which both Soviet and Central Asian values would ultimately be put within this alliance will be taken up in Chapter 4.

Principles of Soviet consumption discourse in the post-war period

By the post-war period, Soviet attitudes toward consumption consisted of a complicated mix that included a determination to satisfy demand, a recognition of consumer desire as basically legitimate, and a persistent wariness of unrestrained consumerism. Already in the middle of the 1930s, the state's approach to consumption had moved away from the ascetic ideals of the revolutionary years and embraced luxury for the few – political and administrative elites as well as industrial and agricultural shock workers – as a harbinger of a socialist future in which luxury would be available to all.¹ A small number of opulent department stores were even built in the Soviet Union, explicitly patterned after Western models like Macy's, with the intention of fostering what was designated as "cultured trade," with gleaming shop windows, lavish displays of goods, and solicitous customer service.² The ideal of "culturedness" (*kul'turnost'*) – encompassing not only an appreciation for high culture, but also a set of "civilized" values like propriety, respectability, and cleanliness – became the paramount value in Soviet discussions of consumption during the late Stalin era, and remained influential still through the post-war decades. On the one hand, this new appeal to "middle-class values," as Vera Dunham observes, authorized consumption and the aspiration toward a form of "domestic happiness" centering on objects and their acquisition as legitimate pursuits for a Soviet person.³ On the other hand, the rhetoric of cultured consumption became the basis for a didactic state program of shaping and corralling consumer demand to turn it away from excessive, misdirected, or "philistine" desires. By the post-war period, Soviet rhetoric did not reject values like beauty, comfort, pleasure, and even individualization as valid

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 227.

² Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 210.

³ Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middle-class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

goals for consumers to pursue. Nevertheless, it firmly maintained that didactic guidance was needed to ensure that consumers pursued these goals with proper restraint and public-minded conscientiousness.

Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, as efforts began in earnest to improve standards of living for the Soviet population and make desired consumer goods widely available, Soviet policy-makers nonetheless maintained a deeply ambivalent attitude toward consumerism and mass culture. State rhetoric framed consumer desire as a natural, even positive phenomenon when properly restrained and directed toward “rational” needs – a category that included not only physiological needs, but also social, cultural, and “spiritual” (that is, aesthetic and creative) ones.⁴ But at the same time, consumer desire was seen as a potential source of danger, vulnerable to the corrupting influences of bourgeois culture as well as the personal weaknesses of individual consumers – above all, of women. As Susan Reid has explained with reference to the Russian context, the fear was that “once unleashed, women’s ‘natural’ acquisitiveness and potentially insatiable desire for glamour and comfort might prove the Achilles heel of socialism.”⁵ The stakes, then, were far from purely aesthetic. The population’s limitless consumptive potential needed to be reined in by regulatory advice supplied by the Soviet press, and above all by women’s journals, in order to maintain clear boundaries between proper (rational, cultured) and improper (excessive, philistine) consumer behaviors. Especially during the Khrushchev years, this advice literature coalesced around an ethos that Reid has dubbed the “Khrushchev Modern,” emphasizing clean lines and aesthetic minimalism over ornate adornment, a focus on practical utility and suitability for the requirements of daily life and work, and a sense of restraint and humility rather than

⁴ Examples of references to “cultural,” “aesthetic,” or “spiritual” needs can be found in: TsGA RUz F. 2350, Op. 1N, d. 19, 48; *Narodnoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo sovetskogo Uzbekistana: tekstil'*, ed. V.A. Nil'sen (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1954), 77; M.G. Gazimagomedov, “Problemy sokhraneniia i razvitiia traditsii narodnogo iskusstva v sviazi s izmeneniiem kon'iunktury sprosa,” *Narodnye khudozhestvennye promysly severnogo Kavkaza: traditsii i sovremennost'*. *Sbornik statei*, ed. D.M. Magomedov (Makhachkala: Dagestanskii filial AN SSSR, 1988), 35.

⁵ Susan Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61/2 (Summer 2002): 240.

ostentatious displays of wealth.⁶ By the mid-1960s, many Soviet design experts had begun to move away from the most rigid versions of this Khrushchevian aesthetic (see Chapter 2), but the principles of restraint and functionalism it espoused continued to be influential in the late Soviet period.

It may initially seem perplexing that, in a planned economy where nearly all production took place under state auspices, efforts to inculcate officially-approved consumption habits rested so heavily not on production-side controls but on exhortations directed at the consumers themselves. In the most notorious example, state institutions continued to manufacture and sell short-wave radios even when it was well-known to Soviet policy-makers that consumers were using these radios to pick up banned foreign broadcasts.⁷ Why not simply force people to consume appropriately by restricting what was available to buy in Soviet shops? There appear to have been a handful of reasons for this rift between the state's production policy and its desired consumption outcomes. The first is that the production of certain types of goods often possessed a logic and an ideological significance of its own, quite independent of the political implications of their use by consumers. Mass production of short-wave radios, for instance, could be trumpeted as a demonstration of the achievements of Soviet technology and industry, and it was left up to the press to ensure that consumers would utilize this technology in a way befitting a good Soviet citizen.⁸ In its appeals to nationalities policy and the state-sponsored preservation of artistic traditions, the manufacture of "national goods" possessed a similar production-side rationale that was largely impervious to concerns about consumer use. In some cases, as well, the economic institutions responsible for production and the cultural and media institutions responsible for

⁶ Susan Reid, "Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 227-268.

⁷ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 132-133; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 175-181.

⁸ Roth-Ey calls this "as good an example as any of Soviet policy incoherence on the macro level," though she notes that "powerful bureaucratic and ideological logics worked to propel radio development in the Soviet Union and frame it as a success story for various individuals and institutions." Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 132-133.

educating consumers were simply working at cross purposes. A 1966 article written by a representative of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Local Industry, for instance, listed the traditional-style Uzbek cradle, the *beshtik*, as one of the "national" items that was currently not being produced in sufficient quantities to meet consumer demand due to the negligence of the Sovnarkhoz;⁹ the writer was evidently either unaware or unconcerned that the *beshtik* was one of the items of Central Asian material culture most unremittingly condemned as backward and unhygienic in the Soviet press during these years.¹⁰ More generally, any failure of state economic institutions to produce items that were in demand among consumers began to be regarded as politically and ideologically unacceptable during the Khrushchev era, when the success of socialism was measured, both within official rhetoric and on the international stage of the Cold War, in terms of the ability to grant a prosperous and fulfilling life to the population at large.¹¹ In this context, production-side restrictions became increasingly less palatable.

More fundamentally, though, the focus on consumer-side regulation reflected a preoccupation with the subjectivity of the consumer within Soviet thought, originating with what Victor Buchli has described as a "shift from denotative to contextual understandings of material culture" after the 1920s. One of the gravest consumer sins, the quality of being "petty-bourgeois" or "philistine" (encapsulated in the Russian term *meshchanstvo*, a label so crucial to Soviet discourses of consumption that it was borrowed into Uzbek as *meshchanlik* and into Kyrgyz as *meshchandyk*), hinged on intangible mentalities more than specific objects. Following the legitimation of luxury and comfort in the rhetoric of the Stalin era, Buchli explains, "Objects, in and of themselves, were not considered to possess any single meaning... It was the context of use which defined whether or not a stuffed sofa could be categorized

⁹ A. Abdurakhmanov, "Iz mestnogo syr'ia, svoimi salami, dlia mestnogo potrebleniia," *Ekonomika i zhizn'* no. 9 (Sep. 1966): 15. On concerns about the dwindling production of traditional-style goods under the Sovnarkhoz, see Chapter 1.

¹⁰ See below.

¹¹ Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 211-252.

as petit-bourgeois or socialist.”¹² As another historian puts it, “Being petty-bourgeois did not consist of the quantity of things a person owned and what kinds of things they were, it lay in the attitude toward things: in comfort for comfort’s sake, in life for the sake of things.”¹³ A small number of objects, as we will see, could still be labeled as unconditionally tasteless or, in the Central Asian context, as “backward” and “uncultured” regardless of circumstance. But more often, the focus of normative discourses lay with questions of use, consciousness, and the context of consumption: whether a consumer utilized particular objects in an appropriate, cultured way, in the proper combination and measure, and with the proper mindset.

As the language of “taste” and fulfillment of “spiritual” needs suggests, the goal of the didactic consumption discourses in the Soviet press was not limited to the regulation of consumer behavior to avert the sort of consumerist apocalypse in which, in Reid’s evocative image, “marauding women” would topple socialism armed only with their “infinitely expanding” shopping bags.¹⁴ Inculcating culturedness and taste in Soviet consumers also meant marshaling consumerism as a force in the creation of a particular kind of Soviet person with a particular set of subjective qualities. Consumption would, with proper guidance, supply the individual with the collection of objects necessary for a fully modern, cultured Soviet life, and the advice offered in the Soviet press, in spite of its occasionally scolding and moralizing tone, was not only concerned with dampening the enthusiasm of consumers for new products, but also with channeling that enthusiasm in particular directions. Beginning in the Stalin-era 1930s, as Jukka Gronow has noted, certain luxury goods were actively urged on consumers, as “the authorities felt that it was their task to cultivate the Soviet consumer, to teach him or her to appreciate

¹² Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (New York: Berg, 1999), 56.

¹³ O. Gurova, “Ot bytovogo asketizma k kul’tu veshchei: ideologiya potrebleniia v sovetskom obshchestve,” *Liudi i veshchi v sovetskoii i postsovetskoii kul’ture*, ed. Ol’ga Echevskaia (Novosibirsk: Izdatel’stvo NGU, 2005), 15.

¹⁴ Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 240.

the many new novelties.”¹⁵ Indeed, much of what can be loosely described as Soviet “advertising” – whether in the form of full-page color images of branded products in women’s journals or of recommendations for general categories of products like dining sets, toiletries, or pantsuits in advice literature – made unabashed appeals to consumerist desire, drawing on language of novelty, beauty, and convenience and linking these notions to officially endorsed virtues like modernity, hygiene, and practicality (Figure 3.1). By the post-war era, the Soviet state’s relationship to consumerism was more complicated than either mere regulation or grudging accommodation of popular demand; arguably, consumption of certain objects in certain ways had become part of what defined a “Soviet person,” as the notion was constructed in the official press. Given the desired outcome of a voluntary and totalistic transformation in mentalities and ways of life, production-side aesthetic and moral controls would never be sufficient, and it was necessary to penetrate to the level of consumers’ domestic spaces and private attitudes to inculcate the values of modernity, culturedness, and good taste.

Between paternalism and cultural translation: Applying Soviet consumption discourses in Central Asia

If all of this was true to a certain extent in Soviet Russia, the questions of nationality and ethno-cultural difference that arose in the Central Asian case both complicated the task of guiding consumer behavior and raised its stakes. The fact that Central Asian consumers could access both European-style and national-style goods through the Soviet economy meant that consumption decisions carried an additional layer of symbolic resonance in comparison with Russia, adding a European/Central Asian axis on top of the existing binaries of modern/traditional, cultured/uncultured, urban/rural, and so on. To a considerable extent, the task of laying out the ideal consumption behaviors for a Soviet Central Asian person (often a Soviet Central Asian woman in particular) fell to the local-language press – what she

¹⁵ Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003), 86.



Figure 3.1. Photograph of a Kyrgyz man shopping for a radio. The man (shown wearing a traditional-style *kalpak*) is shopping at the “Kyzgaldak” department store in Kalinin raion, 1976. Source: T. Edilbaeva, “El zhyrgalchylыgy үchүн,” *Kyrgyzstan Aaldary* no. 12 (Dec. 1976).

should wear, how she should arrange her home, how she should discern quality and make intelligent use of her family’s income. In keeping with the Soviet preference for demand-side regulation over supply-side restrictions on consumption, the Central Asian-language press often presented a narrower and more sharply delimited ideal of Soviet Central Asianness than would be suggested by the production policies of the Soviet state itself. The fact that particular Central Asian “national goods” were mass-produced within state institutions as a matter of policy did not, from the perspective of the consumer advice in the local press, mean that such goods were unconditionally compatible with a modern, Soviet way of life. In fact, it was not unusual for these local press discussions – most of them produced, it should be emphasized, by members of the ethnically Central Asian intelligentsia – to rely on more Russocentric definitions of modernity and Sovietness than existed either in the letter of Soviet policy or in the effusive post-war paeans to Central Asian artistic culture described in Chapter 2. Often, these

writers interpreted the “Khrushchev Modern” aesthetic as a mandate to strip away Central Asian “ornamentalism” and impose Europeanized order and hygiene on traditional (or, in some cases, rural) Central Asian clutter, dust, and darkness. Yet it is important to note that writers for the Central Asian-language press did not merely parrot the principles of dress and home décor that were endorsed in the Russian press during this period. They reimagined them in light of local circumstances. Even as they applied normative Soviet categories like culturedness (*kulturnost'*), philistinism (*meshchanstvo*), and hygiene (*gigiena*) to Central Asian realities, they simultaneously localized them – as *madaniyat*, *meshchanlik*, and *pokizalik* – and this act of translation lent these concepts not only a new set of linguistic connotations but also a new context made up of locally-specific images, associations, and ethical requirements.

Translating Soviet “culturedness”: kul'turnost' and madaniyat. The concept of “culturedness,” in many ways the foundational principle from which all other Soviet notions of appropriate consumption were derived, took on an expanded and altered meaning in the context of Central Asia. It was typically conveyed in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz press with the term *madaniyat*, which, like the Russian *kul'turnost'*, amalgamated elements of material culture, mentalities, and practice, and was typically defined in contrast both to “backwardness” – excessively traditional modes of consumption – and to “philistinism” – excessive showiness, acquisitiveness, and materialism. “Culturedness [*madaniyat*] in a home interior means, above all, cleanliness, functionality, and simple beauty,” explained a 1960 Kyrgyz-language article.¹⁶ “Living well does not mean simply filling one’s house with expensive things regardless of whether or not they are necessary for daily life,” added another; on the contrary, “a good, cultured life” was best achieved through a “harmoniously and cleanly” arranged home where “there is nothing superfluous.”¹⁷ But significantly, the term *madaniyat* fused the meanings of refinement and tact

¹⁶ “Üydü zhasalgaloо zhönündö,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 2 (Feb. 1960): 24.

¹⁷ Darkül Küiükova, “Zhakshy zhashoo – zharkyn köngül üchün,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 1 (Jan. 1972): 20.

contained in the Russian *kul'turnost'* ("culturedness") with the broader civilizational connotations of *kul'tura* ("culture"). Alongside the urban-rural and social hierarchies implicit in the Russian term, the Central Asian translation added an ethnic and cultural distinction as well. *Madaniyat* was, like *kul'turnost'*, imagined to be a product of education and enlightenment, but it was also something that could be diffused through contact with the more Russified urban areas of the region, or even through ownership of specific European-style consumer goods. In a region where "backwardness" historically carried a specifically ethnic connotation, and where practices designated as "uncultured" included markers of Central Asians' cultural difference from Russians like sitting on the floor and eating with the hands rather than with utensils, the pursuit of "culturedness" was tightly caught up with the question of ethnic difference and its acceptable limits under modern, Soviet conditions (Figure 3.2).

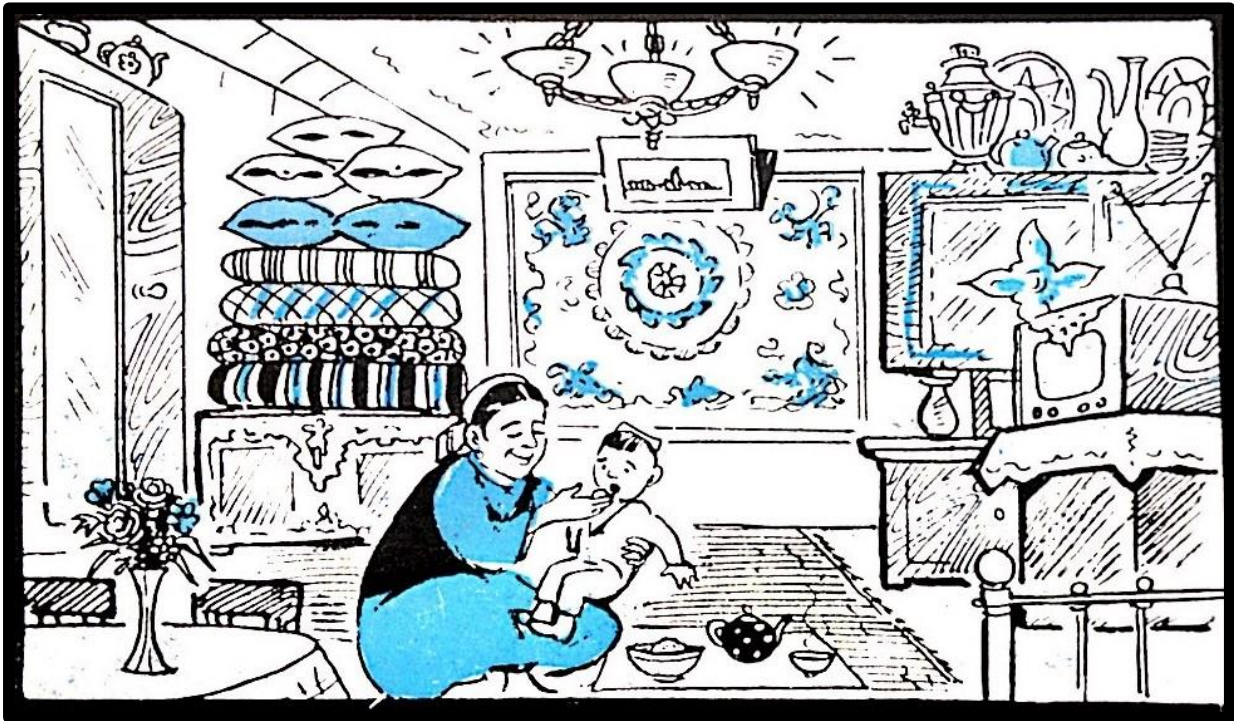


Figure 3.2. The persistence of “uncultured” Central Asian habits. Caption: “Look at Mehrixon’s home. She has dishes, quilts and pillows, furniture... But evidently these are just for looking at and not for using. They still eat food with their hands.” Source: “Qizim, senga aytaman...,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 5 (May 1964).

In this sense, however, culturedness was a double-edged sword. Even in a non-Central Asian context, the concept always contained an implicit tension. It required consumers to be concerned with appearances but not too concerned, to enthusiastically partake in novelties but not a chase idle fashions, to be respectable without being petty-bourgeois. But in Central Asia, the ethnic and cultural dimensions of consumer choice piled on yet another balancing act – neither clinging too tightly to traditional objects and practices, and thus falling victim to “unculturedness” in the sense of backwardness, nor pursuing Europeanizing and modernizing trends too avidly, and thus manifesting the uncultured sin of philistinism.

On the one hand, like the concept of “civilization” in other colonial contexts, culturedness could serve as a tool for the unapologetic denigration of traditional Central Asian practices, linking Europeanization to the imposition of order, progress, health, beauty, and propriety. “Among us there are still those who sit around a *sandal* [an indoor fire pit], swaddle their children in a *beshek* [a traditional-style Uzbek cradle], and instead of a table and chairs sit on the floor,” stated a 1956 Uzbek-language article.¹⁸ These practices, the article assured readers, constituted examples of “unculturedness [*madaniyatsizlik*],” and the superiority of more modern ways of living would be self-evident to anyone who experienced them: “If you try in your own home to install a stove [Russ. *pech’ka*], lie on a bed [Russ. *krovat’*], and sit around a table and chairs [*stol atrofida stulda*]... you will at once understand how pleasant it is to spend your days in this way.” The borrowing of Russian-language terms (*pech’ka*, *krovat’*, *stol*, *stul*) into Uzbek to describe the items of furniture in question only underscored the Russianizing or Europeanizing overtones of this line of argument, pointing to the novelty and foreignness of these objects in the Central Asian context as well as to the special role of Russian culture as the transmitter of European modernity in the region. One Kyrgyz-language article from the 1950s even provided footnotes to define the Russian terms *garderob* (“a cabinet for storing clothing”) and

¹⁸ S. Ashurova, “Yangi uy,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 2 (Feb. 1956): 19.

bufet (“a cabinet where dishes and food are kept”) for local readers who might be unfamiliar with them.¹⁹ In addition to the functional significance attributed to such objects, it at times seems to be precisely their foreignness to the Central Asian context, their contrast with local cultural practices that were presumed to be backward or inferior in some way, that earned them their special status as markers of modernity and culturedness.

Particularly during the Khrushchev-era 1950s and 1960s, the Central Asian press persistently pushed a handful of European items of furniture – beds, dining tables, bookcases, wardrobes – on readers, framing them as the single-handed bearers of culturedness in the Central Asian household, even as the *sine qua non* of a modern, cultured life. The craze for functionally differentiated objects, clean unadorned surfaces, and the rational organization of space in the “Khrushchev Modern” aesthetic fueled a conception of the traditional Central Asian home interior as chaotic, cluttered, dirty, and unsuitable for the demands of modern living. Fortunately, experts in the local press informed readers, these shortcomings could all be corrected through the judicious application of European-style furnishings. According to a 1957 article in the Kyrgyz women’s journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary*, “When you lie on a bed, the bed linens remain clean... Clothing hung in a wardrobe and dishes stored in a cupboard [Russ. *bufet*] will be far from dust, dirt, and insects, and will remain clean.”²⁰ It was essential, many writers emphasized, for every member of the family to have their own bed (Russ. *krovat’*), most often of the factory-produced metal-frame type sold in abundance in Soviet shops, to replace the local practice of sleeping on mats and quilts on the floor.²¹ Central Asian consumers ought also to obtain appropriate storage receptacles for functionally different objects – shelves for books, cupboards for dishes, wardrobes for clothing, and so on – in order to impose a rational order on their home interiors. A 1974

¹⁹ O. Azharkan, “Madaniyattuuluktun dagy bir türü zhönündö,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 2 (Feb. 1957): 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹ “To’pabuvi Bozorovanning hikoyasi: Bizning uy,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 6 (Jun. 1954): 18.

ethnographic study of villages in the Issyk Kul region of Kyrgyzstan referenced the adoption of this new style of organization as an indication of the progress that had been achieved in rural life since the 1950s: “Dishware and utensils of various types are not stored, as previously, openly on the floor, tables, or in felt bags, but are placed in hutches, sideboards, kitchen table-cupboards, or in specially made wooden shelves in the kitchen or dining room.”²² The arrival of a new cabinet or wardrobe in a Central Asian home could even be hailed as a momentous event in didactic stories in the press, serving as an index of the family’s cultural transformation.²³ European-style items of furniture were thus often presented as the most direct route to the well-ordered, tidy, productive household envisioned in the Khrushchev-era ideal.

The most curiously persistent single indicator of modernity and culturedness in the Khrushchev-era Central Asian press was the ownership of a European-style dining table and chairs (almost invariably designated with the borrowed Russian terms *stol* and *stul* in Central Asian-language texts). On the one hand, a table and chairs could be positioned as a hygienic alternative to the traditional practice of eating while seated on pillows and mats on the floor, which would supposedly lead to contamination with dust and dirt and the need to constantly launder rugs and linens.²⁴ But the significance of the dining table extended beyond its mealtime functions. The table was imagined as the primary site within the home for activities associated with literacy and education, two essential prerequisites of Soviet “culturedness.” In the past, a 1954 Uzbek-language article stated, it may have been acceptable to live in a home without a table and chairs because at that time everyone was “uneducated [*ilmsiz*].” But in circumstances in which “everyone is educated, the children go to school and need to do homework, and

²² S.M. Abramzon, G.N. Simakov, and L.A. Firshtein, “Nov’ kirgizskogo sela,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 5 (1974): 35.

²³ See, for example, S. Ashurova, “Yangi uy,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 2 (Feb. 1956): 18-19.

²⁴ S. Hasanov, “Oila davrasida,” *Saodat* no. 11 (Nov. 1976): 28.

the adults need to write letters and read books,” a table and set of chairs had become obligatory.²⁵ The necessity of a European-style table in a child’s education, in particular, became the focus of a persistent and badgering discourse in the Kyrgyz-language press from the 1950s through the 1970s. Kyrgyz journals frequently deployed the trope of a child lying face-down on the floor to complete his or her homework, with the implication that the failure to supply a table and chairs for this purpose was tantamount to parental neglect.²⁶ In an especially mean-spirited variation on this theme, a cartoon on the cover of a 1972 issue of the journal *Chalkan* showed Kyrgyz parents gleefully counting a chest full of money while their children languished over their homework on the floor (Figure 3.3). The woman in the image asks the man whether they should spend their growing wealth to buy a table (here in a Kyrgyzified version of the Russian term, *üstöl*, perhaps meant to indicate the family’s rural origin), but he responds dismissively, “Sackcloth and skins are enough for the children.”²⁷ The implication that only a sense of callous greed and selfishness prevented Kyrgyz families from buying dining tables seems calibrated to strike at feelings of guilt, shame, and both personal and collective Central Asian values regarding the love of and care for children.

In spite of the conviction with which many writers pushed items like the dining table, the wardrobe, and the European-style bed as the keys to a modern and cultured life, though, they also recognized that consumers might not always utilize them in their intended way, generating entire new arenas for “uncultured” behavior. Kyrgyzstan’s rural intelligentsia, one article stated, were supposed to serve as model Soviet citizens and “disseminators of culturedness” among their less-educated

²⁵ “To’pabuvi Bozorovanning hikoyasi: Bizning uy,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 6 (Jun. 1954): 18.

²⁶ Examples can be found in Zarlyk Babaev, “Baigazynyn üyündö,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1964): 23; Asanbek Tabaldiev, “Üy turmushunun arkhitektorloru,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1967): 13-14. Although rarer in the Uzbek-language press, the above-cited article “To’pabuvi Bozorovanning hikoyasi: Bizning uy” makes use of the same image: “In this family, they still eat their meals bent over a carpet on the floor. They eat and lie in this same place, and in one corner of this same area the children sit hunched over and do their homework.”

²⁷ Image by T. Koichuev, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1972).



Figure 3.3. European goods as a parental obligation. Caption: – “Perhaps we should buy a table for them?” – “Sackcloth and skins are enough for the children.” Source: Image by T. Konchuev, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1972).

compatriots. But in the home of a rural school director named Mukash Akmatov, modern-style objects had fallen victim to a more general disorder: “His cupboard [Russ. *bufet*] was being used to store books... His writing table had turned into storage for dishes. It was not clear where he and his wife should sit to prepare their lessons.”²⁸ Even in more orderly households, European-style objects like tables and beds could be put to unexpected uses that rendered their role in Central Asian life more ambiguous than the totalistic modernizing transformation imagined in some press accounts. A 1969 Soviet ethnographic study emphasized the gradually growing presence of contemporary furnishings in rural Uzbek homes, but was forced to concede that in many families, “the bed plays a decorative role more than it is used for its intended purpose” (Figure 3.4).²⁹ A similar study described an urban Uzbek worker’s home in which the dining table appeared to be used primarily as a passive storage space for books and tea services rather than as a site for eating meals, reading, or writing.³⁰ Articles in the Central Asian press expressed anxieties about this incomplete adoption of European ways of living, speculating that the material accoutrements of a modern and “cultured” life were simply being used to paper over backward mentalities and attitudes: “The home is new, the thinking is old.”³¹ A 1952 satirical cartoon showed an Uzbek man carrying home an armload of modern electronic consumer goods while trailed by a wife veiled in a paranji. His reasoning served as a parody of the assumption that the possession of modern-style goods signified, or could itself produce, culturedness: “Well, let them try to say your husband isn’t a cultured person [*kul’turniy kishi*] after all of this!” (Figure 3.5). The superficiality and

²⁸ Azharkan, “Madaniyattuuluktun dagy bir türü zhönündö,” 21.

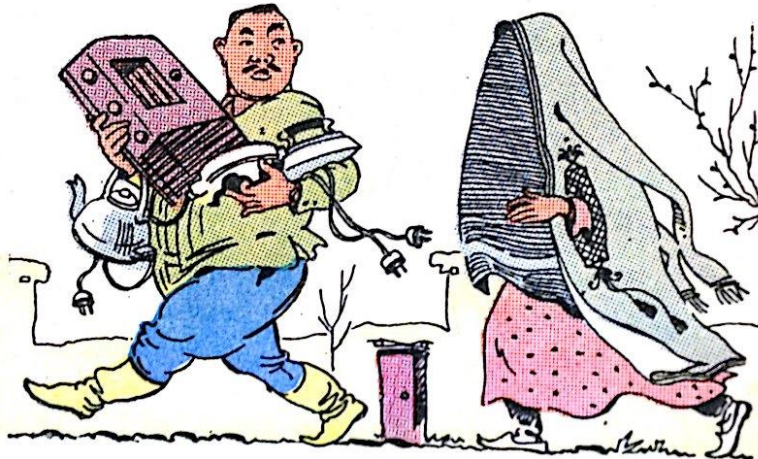
²⁹ B.Kh. Karmysheva, “Bytovoi uklad naseleniia,” *Etnograficheskie ocherki uzbekskogo sel’skogo naseleniia*, ed. G.P. Vasil’eva and B.Kh. Karmysheva (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1969), 182.

³⁰ K.L. Zadykhina, “Etnograficheskie materialy o byte rabochikh-uzbekov Tashkenta i Andijana,” *Sredneaziatskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, t. 2 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), 117.

³¹ “Uy yangicha, o’y eskicha,” *Mushtum* no. 23 (Dec. 1964): 2.



Figure 3.4. Rural home interior in the Uzbek village of Namazgo, 1960s. Caption: “Suleiman Adilov, secretary of the administration of the collective farm ‘Communism,’ at home.” Source: Photo by N.S. Karmazina, *Etnograficheskie ocherki uzbekskogo sel'skogo naseleniia*, ed. G.P. Vasil'eva and B. Kh. Karmysheva (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1969), 165.



— Қани, бу тарақа-турукдан кейин ҳам эрингиз культурний киши эмас, деб кўришсинчи, хотин.

Figure 3.5. Markers of a “cultured person.” Caption: “Well, let them try to say your husband isn’t a cultured person after all of this!” Source: Image by D. Sinitskii, *Mushtum* no. 4 (Apr. 1952): 6.

incompleteness of his transformation is, perhaps, underscored by his use of the untranslated Russian term “*kul’turnyi*” in his otherwise Uzbek-language declaration.

Even more strikingly, though, the fact that the Soviet ideal of “cultured consumption” was also imagined as the antithesis of over-consumption and bourgeois mentalities meant that the rhetoric of culturedness could be deployed in the Central Asian context to quite different ends. It was occasionally used to critique individuals who *too* avidly pursued European-style goods, who dressed too differently from their neighbors, and who snobbishly looked down on their “backward” co-ethnics. An Uzbek-language article titled “A cultured person [*Madaniy kishi*],” originally printed in 1959 and re-published in 1976 with a note from the editors citing “demands and requests from many of our journal readers” to provide more coverage of this topic, tackled the question of culturedness in dress. Rather than critiquing clothing choices that were not sufficiently Europeanized, the article, written by an ethnically Uzbek philologist named Izzat Sulton, took aim at a sort of unculturedness that resulted from the opposite extreme – pretentiousness, materialism, and implicitly, an excessive indulgence in and regard for European-style fashions.

Some people understand culture as external flashiness and place all of their efforts on dressing well. Such people like to display their “culture” and show off their possessions and wealth to prove their “culturedness.” But in fact, boastfulness, and especially boasting with one’s possessions and wealth, is one of the clearest indications not of culturedness, but of unculturedness.³²

Sulton emphasizes the socialist ideological basis for this position, echoing Soviet rhetoric in labeling such acquisitive, philistine mentalities as a form of backwardness in themselves, if not a uniquely Central Asian one; they represent, he says, “disgusting survivals of the old world that was ruled by private property and selfishness.” But in his definition, genuine “culturedness” has less to do with Europeanization and modernization than with adherence to a more locally oriented form of morality.

³² Izzat Sulton, “*Madaniy kishi*,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 9 (Sep. 1959): 18. The article was reprinted in *Saodat* no. 8 (Aug. 1976): 18.

He underscores the responsibility of dressing in accordance with the norms and standards of the local community, strongly advising readers against wearing clothing that might “offend the aesthetic sensibility of others” or “cause irritation [*gashtini keltirmaydigan kiyim*].” “Most importantly,” Sul-ton’s article concluded, “clothing must give evidence of its owner’s purity, humility, and good taste.”

The danger that Central Asian consumers might violate the requirements of “cultured consumption” by going too far in pursuing modern European fashions was reiterated in another Uzbek-language article printed in 1976, titled “Etiquette, the mirror of culturedness.” “Unfortunately,” the author wrote, “among us one can meet young men and women who have given themselves over to clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics, forgotten ethical norms, and turned into laughable puppets.”³³ The targets of this tirade were the adherents of the late-Soviet *stiliagi* youth subculture. As discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Central Asian youths who avidly pursued Western-style fashions ran afoul both of the Soviet principles of social consciousness and restraint in consumption and of the local Central Asian norms of youth deference and modesty in dress, especially female dress. Although the 1976 article adheres to the basic structure of all-Soviet critiques of excessive youth consumption and philistine attitudes toward consumer goods, the charged and almost xenophobic language with which the author describes these fashion-obsessed youths suggests that it was, at least in part, their violation of specifically local practices and norms that was so offensive: “They have thrust themselves into our society, as alien and ugly [*yot, xunuk*] as black crows among white doves.” If the Soviet concept of culturedness could be deployed to urge Central Asian consumers to adopt more “modern” and European-style goods and lifestyles, its principles of modesty and restraint could also be arrayed against Central Asians who consumed such goods out of proportion with their neighbors and in violation of local community expectations. While an explicit condemnation of Europeanization in these terms was rare in the didactic press, an implied link between Europeanization, moral degeneration, and alienation from

³³ Mirzakalon Ismoilii, “Odob – madaniyatning ko’zgusi,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 21.

the local community frequently emerged through the less overt language of jokes, anecdotes, and cartoons that prevailed in the local satirical press, as we shall see in the next chapter.

A Central Asian face for meshchanstvo: Conspicuous consumption, traditionalist accumulation, and intra-ethnic divides. The fundamental ambivalence toward consumption in post-war Soviet thinking, in which the authorities and the press aimed on the one hand to rein in “excessive” consumerist desire and on the other hand to foster an appreciation for beautiful objects and modern conveniences as part of the formation of a cultured Soviet person, was only amplified in the Central Asian context. Even more than in Russia, the act of becoming a modern and cultured person in Central Asia was tied up with the consumption of particular kinds of goods, often European-style ones. In this context, local experts’ concerns about fostering a restrained, conscientious mentality at times evaporated in favor of unabashed appeals to consumerist desire. Writers for the local-language press might even readily celebrate a kind of “conspicuous consumption” and self-comparison with one’s neighbors when it had the potential to act as a force in the modernization of local lifestyles. In particular, the fact that many rural Central Asians coveted urban prosperity (with its frequent corollary of increased consumption of European-style goods) could be construed as a distinctly socialist aspiration for modernity and progress. A 1956 article described how an Uzbek collective farmer named Shabon To’yeva moved from her “old house made of ancient clay” to a newly constructed home in her rural kolkhoz and proceeded to decorate the interior with all of the objects befitting a modern Soviet household. But after obtaining a bed, table and chairs, and other “necessary, simple things,” she realized that one thing was still lacking:

Her neighbor, collective farm chairman Avezov, advised her to buy a chest of drawers [Uzb. *shifaner*, from Russ. *shifon’er*]. There was a chest of drawers in the chairman’s house as well. Shabon-opa planned to get one like his, with doors on both sides and a mirror of equal height in the center. However, since there was not one with a built-in mirror, she bought one without a mirror, which she can add later, after all... Seeing the house, her neighbors all said, “Oooh, Shabon’s house looks just like the house of an employee [*xizmatchi*] in the city!”³⁴

³⁴ S. Ashurova, “Yangi uy,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 2 (Feb. 1956): 19.

As the hero of this story, which is overtly didactic in its language and structure despite being presented as a factual account, Shabon-opa is described in unrestrainedly hagiographic terms: “The ordinary kolkhoznik Shabon-opa... has embarked on the path to living a cultured life, kindling a bold flame against the old practices.” Yet her actions in the story model behavior that one might not expect from a typical Soviet protagonist: scrutinizing the possessions of others, shopping for a desired object, and finally being rewarded with the approval and even envy of her neighbors. Her quality of conscientious restraint is, perhaps, indicated in the fact that she is temporarily willing to accept a chest of drawers that did not fit her initial ideal (one without a mirror). But she also aspires to material comforts beyond her current grasp – not to mention, beyond the current capacity of state infrastructure – ending an inspirational speech to her neighbors with the triumphant declaration, “Let an electrical station be built in our kolkhoz, and on that very day I will buy a refrigerator.”³⁵ Aside from supporting the state’s claims about rising kolkhoz incomes and the narrowing gap between urban and rural lifestyles, Shabon-opa’s story also acts to authorize at least some forms of Central Asian consumerist desire as explicitly, even heroically, socialist.

Nor were efforts to foster desire within the population limited solely to European-style consumer goods. Both official rhetoric and the local-language press sought to instruct Central Asian consumers in the appropriate ways to desire and consume the traditional-style “folk artistic crafts” that were being produced within Soviet institutions in the post-war decades. Following the wave of measures for the revitalization of folk crafts production in Central Asia in 1968,³⁶ carpet-making enterprises in Uzbekistan’s Khorezm oblast’ were directed, among other things, to release “a full-color advertisement album... on the main types of items of folk crafts,” intended to “broadly familiarize

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶ See Chapter 1.

consumers with their products and their characteristics.”³⁷ The advertisement of high-quality Uzbek handicrafts was seen as especially necessary because it had been reported that the local population had manifested low demand for such objects as a consequence of their high prices.³⁸ The explicit purpose of such advertisements, then, was to instill the correct sort of desire in consumers, to “educate their taste” by inculcating in them the value of expensive, hand-made, high-quality national goods. A colorful advertisement for the Tashkent Artistic Goods Factory, published in a 1969 issue of *Ekonomika i zhizn’*, tantalized consumers with a variety of richly embroidered goods representing “the renowned art of Uzbek masters,” noting that such works had received high praise at international exhibitions in Montreal and Leipzig.³⁹ A 1968 advertisement invoked a more domestic ideal in urging state-produced national goods on local consumers – “Every housewife [*khoziaika*] will be glad to have in her home the teapots, *piyolas*, serving dishes, and decorative vases manufactured by the Tashkent Porcelain Factory” – but similarly sought to draw the eye with a full-page, color image of dishes decorated with “national” ornamentation (in this case, including the stylized cotton boll motif that had been popularized during the Stalin era) (Figure 3.6). Even more pervasive as a tool for encouraging consumers to seek out Central Asian-style goods were the feature articles and photo essays printed in local-language women’s journals heralding the production of traditional-style goods within Soviet institutions. While these features in part served to propagandize the state’s production policy as a magnanimous expression of the USSR’s anti-colonial approach to national cultures, they also underscored the uniqueness and beauty of such goods and their accessibility to local consumers. A 1971 article praising the crafts of the Uzbek city Urgut, for instance, ended with the promise, “If you enter the shops of any city of our republic, you will doubtless see examples of the art of Urgut’s craftsmen, distinguished by their quality

³⁷ TsGA RUz F. 1752, Op. 6, d. 244, 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

³⁹ *Ekonomika i zhizn’* [Tashkent] no. 2 (Feb. 1969). A number of Soviet journals carried the title *Ekonomika i zhizn’*; this one was based in Tashkent but published in the Russian language.

**КАЖДАЯ ХОЗЯЙКА БУДЕТ
РАДА ИМЕТЬ У СЕБЯ ДОМА
ЧАЙНИКИ, ПИАЛЫ, БЛЮДЦА
И ДЕКОРАТИВНЫЕ ВАЗЫ,
ИЗГОТОВЛЕННЫЕ
ТАШКЕНТСКИМ
ФАРФОРОВЫМ
ЗАВОДОМ**



ФАРФО

Цена
Индекс

Figure 3.6. Advertisement for the Tashkent Porcelain Factory, 1969. Source: *Ekonomika i zhizn'* [Tashkent] no. 2 (Feb. 1969).

and elegance.”⁴⁰ National-style goods, as well as European-style ones, could become part of the Soviet project of shaping the ideal socialist consumer through the inculcation of desire for tasteful, high-quality, officially and professionally endorsed objects.

Yet just as the dangers of “backward” traditionalism were constantly on the radar of writers for the local-language press, the specificities of the Central Asian context tended to inflate the imagined dangers of *meshchanstvo* and consumerist excess as well. Soviet rhetoric intermittently portrayed the Central Asian population in ways that suggested that it was especially vulnerable to “petty-bourgeois” consumption habits and thus in need of special guidance and admonishment.⁴¹ And in spite of their determination to avoid colonialist or racist attitudes, Soviet officials, ethnographers, and writers were not immune to quasi-Orientalist assumptions linking Central Asian ethnicity to a cultural propensity for the excessive accumulation of goods and a weakness for lavish ornamentation and luxury. Central Asian teahouses, for example, were typically associated with indolence and idleness in press representations, while Central Asian bazaars were depicted as breeding grounds of illicit trade and a sordidly commercial mindset (Figure 3.7). Even the vibrant color and ornament of Central Asian folk art, which by the post-war period was more often praised than disparaged in Soviet artistic circles, could be taken as a symptom of the local predisposition toward showiness and extravagance. If these assumptions likely did not originate from among ethnic Central Asians themselves, they were perpetuated in the local-language press and became a constituent part of how a locally specific meaning was constructed for “excessive” or “philistine” consumption in the Central Asian context.

The ostensible Central Asian tendency toward materialistic excess came most directly under fire in press attacks on the lavish feasts and gift-giving exchanges (Uzb. *to’y*, Kyrg. *toi*) that surrounded major

⁴⁰ B. Mizroxin, “Urgutda hamisha bahor,” *Saodat* no. 10 (Oct. 1971).

⁴¹ Kristin Roth-Ey notes, for instance, that in the sphere of film viewership Central Asian and Caucasian consumers served as “easy targets to scapegoat for perceived bad taste,” and it was common to attribute the enthusiasm of the Soviet population for imported Indian genre films to the rural and backward viewers from those regions. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 89-91.



Figure 3.7. “The everyday life of one teahouse.” Caption: “A teahouse is a place for the laboring people to rest. It cannot be turned into a nest of parasites, slanderers, and speculators!” Source: Image by D. Sinitskii, *Mushtum* no. 1 (Jan. 1968): 13.

life events in the region – births, circumcisions, weddings, funerals, and so on. There is evidence that the newfound prosperity and increased availability of consumer goods during the Brezhnev years in Central Asia did indeed feed into increasingly lavish wedding feasts and extravagant gift-giving (including in the forms of the bride-price and dowry), which by this period consisted in large part of the exchange of consumer goods obtained from Soviet shops.⁴² Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the local-language press began to express increasing concern about the phenomenon of the “extravagant *to’y*” and the “sickness of philistinism [*meshchanlik kasali*]” of which it was a symptom.⁴³ Uzbek wedding celebrations, in particular, were depicted as raucous and profligate affairs, involving hundreds of guests, the accumulation of expensive and purposeless gifts, the waste of massive amounts of food, and overspending to the point of indebtedness (Figure 3.8). Gifts for the bride, according to one of the readers’ letters solicited for the periodic discussions of this issue in the Uzbek press, could include thirty dresses, more than twenty headscarves, five overcoats, two raincoats, fifteen tablecloths, and as many towels;⁴⁴ another reader’s letter cited as many as forty *ko’rpalas* and *ko’rpalachas* and thirty silk dresses from the bride’s parents alone.⁴⁵ Press accounts emphasized that while such celebrations were only possible because of the material “abundance” that Soviet rule had provided, it was irresponsible and immoral to turn this abundance into extravagance and waste, in which “everything is increased beyond all measure.”⁴⁶ The roots of this harmful practice were to be found, it was argued, in Central Asian customs that had “survived from ancient times.”⁴⁷ But while the tendency toward extravagance itself

⁴² Victoria Koroteyeva and Ekaterina Makarova, “Money and Social Connections in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Uzbek City,” *Central Asian Survey* 17/4 (1998): 579-596.

⁴³ Nazir Safarov, “*To’y To’ydek Bo’lsin*,” *Saodat* no. 11 (Nov. 1971): 22.

⁴⁴ “*Besh yuz xatda bir fikr*,” *Saodat* no. 8 (Aug. 1974): 28.

⁴⁵ “*Me’yori bilan-da, aylanay!*,” *Saodat* no. 4 (Apr. 1980): 30-31.

⁴⁶ Madina To’raqulova, “*Siz Nima Deysiz?*,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1968): 28.

⁴⁷ Inobatxon Mavlonova, “*Nima keragu, nima nokerak?*,” *Saodat* no. 1 (Jan. 1979): 28.

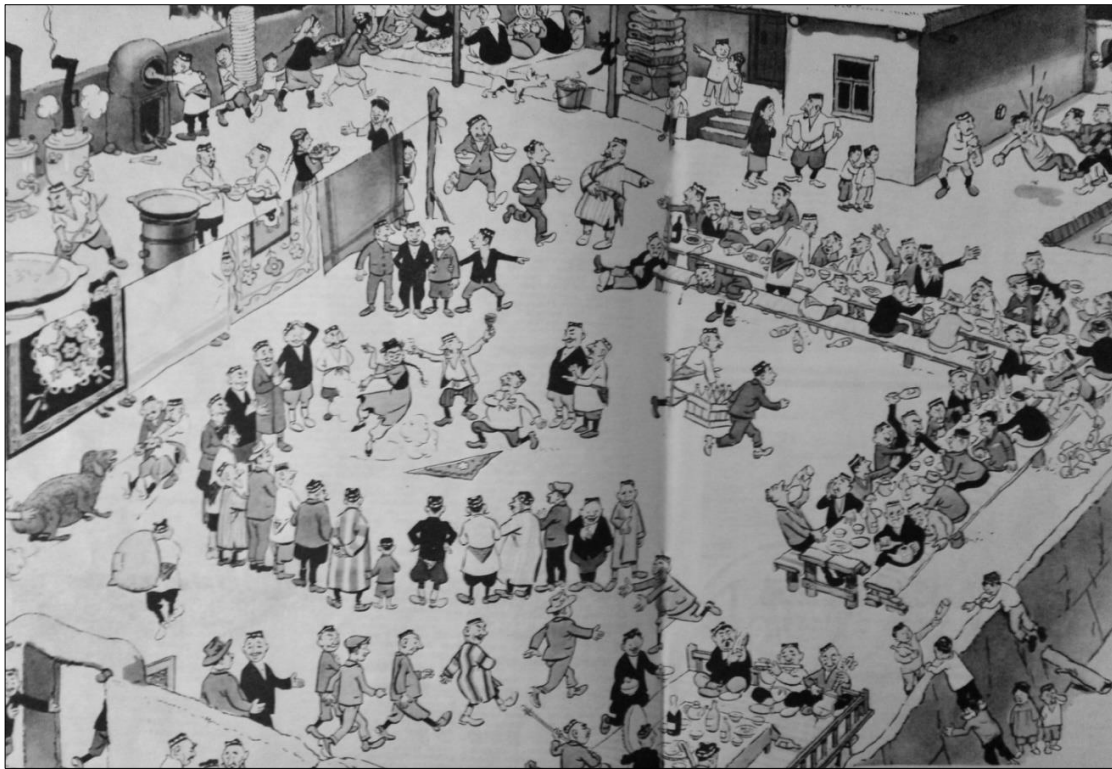


Figure 3.8. Satire of an “excessive” Uzbek wedding feast (*to’y*). Source: Image by D. Sinitskii, *Mushtum* no. 7 (Apr. 1965): 6-7.

was presented as a “survival of the past” and a feature of Central Asian culture, the types of goods that were accumulated in this way were products of the contemporary Soviet economy, including both national-style and European-style goods. A 1964 satirical cartoon, for instance, portrayed an Uzbek man crushed under the weight of the bride price (Uzb. *qalyn*), showing the mixture of national-style and modern consumer goods that made up a typical bride price during this period: lengths of cloth for dress-making, carpets, pillows, a carved wooden chest, a television set, a refrigerator, even a Russian-style samovar (Figure 3.9). None of these objects, in and of itself, was unambiguously objectionable within Soviet consumption discourse; the qualities of Central Asian “excess” and “philistinism,” in this view, derived not from the consumption of particular kinds of stigmatized goods but from the practice



Figure 3.9. Crushed beneath the weight of the dowry (*qalin*). Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 14 (Jul. 1964): 2.

of accumulating *any* kinds of goods out of proportion with their functionality and with the buyers' financial solvency.

In other cases, it was not mere quantity but patterns of use – and what they were assumed to imply about the consumer's subjectivity – that implicated Central Asian-style consumption in the sins of excess and philistinism. In particular, the press found it necessary to repeatedly disparage the Central Asian practice of accumulating large quantities of traditional-style ceramic dishes, especially when they were maintained solely for the purpose of decorative display and never used in daily life. Like the phenomenon of the “extravagant *to'y*,” this appears to have been a real practice, rooted in in part in local forms of sociability, rather than an invention of the Soviet press. A 1954 Soviet ethnographic study offered a relatively neutral description of the practice of “intricate arrangement of various types of dishes on shelves and in niches” among the Kyrgyz population of the Ferghana Valley, noting that a

single household might possess “as many as ten teapots” in addition to countless *piyolas*, clay bowls, and serving dishes. “Such an ‘exhibition’ of dishware is viewed as decoration,” the author explained.⁴⁸ In the local-language press, the possession of an appropriate number of dishes – whether European or national in style – could be framed positively, even as a requirement of culturedness, allowing for the proper reception of guests. “With regard to the number of dishes in a household,” stated a 1962 Kyrgyz article, “every person should have his own teacup [Kyrg. *chyny*], plate [Russ. *tarelka*], spoon, and fork [Russ. *vilka*].”⁴⁹ A 1965 Uzbek article went so far as to define the ownership of large quantities of china dishware, including “a separate teapot and *piyola* for each person,” as a “good tradition,” indicative of superior local norms of hospitality, that ought to be adopted from the Karakalpak ASSR in Uzbekistan and spread throughout the republic.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, possessing a large quantity of beautiful dishware that was used only for decorative display repeatedly came under attack in the post-war Central Asian press as the height of philistinism. From the standpoint of Soviet standards of conscientious consumption, the practice of maintaining an untouched “exhibition” of dishware within the home was framed as the symptom of a grasping, acquisitive mindset, more concerned with materialistic accumulation for its own sake than with creating the conditions for a cultured and comfortable life. In one rural home, according to a 1967 Kyrgyz article, the owners possessed a number of *shyrdaks* and “close to three hundred pieces of china,” but lacked any toys for the children. Such a situation could only be attributed, the writer stated, to the “avariciousness” of the residents.⁵¹ From the perspective of the local Central Asian community, this sort of accumulation could be interpreted as socially divisive and lacking in humility. In the judgement of a young Uzbek woman at the meeting of a rural woman’s

⁴⁸ S.M. Abramzon, “Proshloe i nastoiashchee kirgizskikh shakhterov Kyzyl-Kiia,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 4 (1954): 72.

⁴⁹ “Paidaluu keneshter,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 8 (Aug. 1962): 24.

⁵⁰ “Yaxshi va yomon odatlar,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 6 (Jun. 1965): 31.

⁵¹ Asanbek Tabaldiev, “Üy turmushunun arkhitektorloru,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1967): 13.

council, published in a 1979 issue of *Saodat*, “As if it weren’t enough to line a shelf with countless dishes, some people pile them on top as well. In my opinion, this is an uncultured practice [*madaniyatsizlik*], it looks like you are showing off your possessions.”⁵²

In some cases, it was specifically the ownership of too many national-style objects that could be framed as a manifestation of excess and a symptom of *meshchanstvo*. It became commonplace for writers to suggest that the possession of too many “purposeless” traditional-style objects – especially items of ceramic dishware and the quilts, blankets, pillowcases, and tapestries that made up the Kyrgyz *zhük* – itself constituted an indication of the luxurious expenditure of wealth, consumerist excess, and “petty-bourgeois” fascination with the accumulation of purposeless material things. Yet an uncomfortable association could arise between accusations of philistine excess and the realities of rural privation. In a counterintuitive twist, the *lack* of certain European-style goods in a rural home could even be taken as evidence of showy luxury and *meshchanstvo*. In 1972, actress Darkül Küiükova wrote an article for the Kyrgyz-language women’s journal describing her visit to two rural Kyrgyz households. She noted that the first shepherd’s house provided unequivocal evidence that he was “living well”; most unequivocally, there was a Volga car standing in the driveway. The fact that the main room of the man’s house contained stacks of traditional Kyrgyz-style soft furnishings – carpets, *tush-kiyiz*, *ala-kiyiz*, and *shyrdaks* – was only taken as further confirmation of his wealth. This state of affairs was contrasted with the more approvingly evaluated second home, where “the wealth was not so noticeable [*ancha dele közgö tüşhö kaluuchu bailyk baikalбайт*].” Rather than an accumulation of purposeless objects, “there were only those objects which are necessary for life, and the interior of the house was arranged harmoniously and cleanly... There was nothing superfluous.”⁵³ If this accords closely with the Soviet rhetoric of appropriate consumption, Küiükova’s description of the first shepherd’s house somehow

⁵² Inobatxon Mavlonova, “Nima keragu, nima nokerak?,” *Saodat* no. 1 (Jan.1979): 29.

⁵³ Küiükova, “Zhakshy zhashoo – zharkyn köngül üchün,” 20.

simultaneously evokes luxury and impoverishment, conspicuous consumption and total neglect: “The house’s walls were completely covered with carpets and *tush-kiyiz*, and the floors with *ala kiyiz* and *shyrdaks*. These objects must not have been touched by a human hand for months or years; there was dust and the smell of age [*eskirgen zhyt zhyttanat*]. There were so many decorations everywhere that the interior of the house was dark [*karanggy*].” Critiques of bourgeois luxury bled seamlessly into critiques of uneducated backwardness and poor hygiene, complete with evocations of the tropes of the “old [*eski*]” and “dark [*karanggy*]” that were typically applied to stigmatized Central Asian practices in Soviet rhetoric.

For obvious reasons, it was crucial that “backward,” “uncultured,” or otherwise excessively traditional practices did not come to be associated with poverty in Soviet rhetoric. Articles on this topic were nearly always careful to explain that excessive reliance on traditional-style furnishings or failure to meet modern standards of cleanliness and household order should not be taken as an indicator of the family’s lack of purchasing power; the family in question *could* afford to buy a European-style dining set, a wardrobe, or a bed for each member of the family, the argument went, and they simply chose not to. In a 1984 Uzbek satirical cartoon, a family drinks tea from chipped and cracked teacups while seated in front of a cabinet filled with immaculate, ornately decorated and carefully arranged teapots, *piyolas*, and serving platters. The young boy asks his mother why they cannot use the newer dishes instead of the old and cracked ones, and she replies, “We are saving those for your wedding” (Figure 3.10).⁵⁴ The argument implicit in representations like these seems to be that external signs of poverty, especially among rural Central Asians, were in reality only a consequence of incorrect consumer decision-making, attributable to mistaken, or worse, harmfully acquisitive mentalities. On one level, then, the discourse of excess and *meshchanstvo* as it was developed in the Central Asian-language press functioned to

⁵⁴ Image by Rauf Ahmedov, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Sep. 1984): 12.

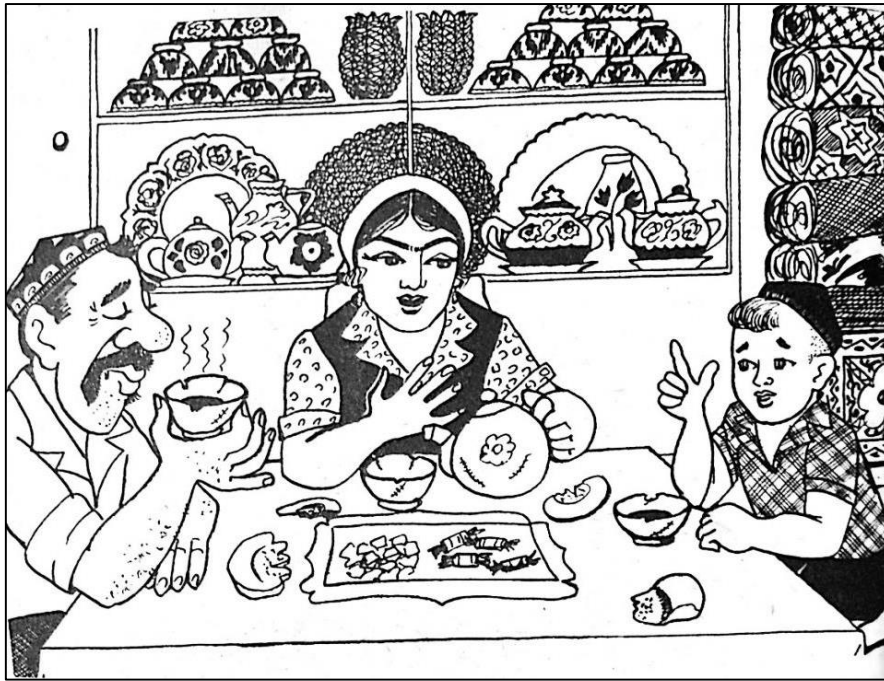


Figure 3.10. An “exhibition” of dishware. Caption: – “Mother, let’s drink from those *piyolas*.” – “We are saving them for your wedding.” Source: Image by Rauf Ahmedov, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Sep. 1984): 12.

obfuscate a real urban-rural disparity in incomes and in access to certain consumer goods.⁵⁵ On another level, this discourse served to add a new layer of stigma to, and a new justification for disparagement of, rural poverty. The (presumed) existence of a cabinet containing a new, pristine tea service justifies the position that drinking out of chipped and cracked *piyolas* indicates not only unculturedness but also stinginess; to return to an earlier example, the (presumed) existence of a lockbox filled with cash justifies the disgust that is directed at Kyrgyz families that do not own European-style tables and chairs. In this way, the differences between urban and rural ways of life acquired a new and morally charged significance in the post-war Soviet period, as systemic economic causes for the gap were ruled out within official rhetoric, and the problem was relocated to the individual and his or her flaws of character. Within this framework, the cultural distaste for rural life among certain members of the

⁵⁵ On real socioeconomic disparities in post-war Central Asia, see Chapter 5.

urban, Soviet-aligned Central Asian intelligentsia could be reframed as a moral objection, and rural consumption practices could be doubly stigmatized as excessive and lacking, culturally backward and economically extravagant.

Like the concept of “culturedness,” however, “philistinism” was double-edged, and could be deployed to critique an excessive interest in modern novelties and European-style goods as easily as the amassing of national-style objects. If wearing shoddy and wrinkled clothing on the street was a symptom of unculturedness, “there are also some men who strut down the street wearing clothes as crisp as if they were newly made, neat and ironed,” explained a 1976 Uzbek article. When such an individual becomes so preoccupied with his own appearance that he looks down on other passersby and fails to greet them with proper etiquette, the writer asserts, he becomes little more than an “externally shining snob.”⁵⁶ The danger that the presumed superiority of novel and European-style goods would lead some Central Asian consumers to snobbish and supercilious attitudes toward their co-ethnics was similarly emphasized in a 1978 piece in *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary*. A reader from the city of Kyzyl-Kyia wrote in to complain about a female neighbor who always “makes fun of simply and modestly dressed people” and, when visiting someone’s home, would brag, “We had things like yours before, but now we have bought this and that.”⁵⁷ The article’s title – “The greatest treasure is conscience!” – in some ways serves as a challenge to the judgmental, almost classist critiques of rural Central Asian consumption practices that appeared periodically in the local-language press, with the traditional virtues of “simplicity” and “modesty” favorably contrasted to the philistine preoccupation with wealth and appearances. A didactic excerpt from a short story titled “Crystal Chandeliers” (*Billur qandillar*) was printed in *Saodat* in 1975 with an explanatory note from the editors characterizing the story as a tale of “the intense struggle

⁵⁶ Mirzakalon Ismoiliiy, “Odob – Madaniyatning ko’zgusi,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 21.

⁵⁷ Tügölbai Sydykbekov, “Eng asyl bailyk – ynsap!,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 7 (Jun. 1978): 13.

between honest people [*pok kishilar*] and graspers [*yulg'ichlar*] who desire property.”⁵⁸ In the story, a young Uzbek soldier visits the home of an old friend from his village, Begimqul, who has since grown wealthy, it is implied, through dishonest means. The text lingers on descriptions of the seductive but amoral luxury of Begimqul’s domestic interior: a “shining, imported” hutch covered with teapots and “delicate” drinking glasses, a similarly “shining” table spread with a “thick, fringed tablecloth,” a “large-screened, color television,” and finally, in the center of the ceiling, a large crystal chandelier. If individually these objects might have served as indicators of progress, of the Europeanized modernity, “culturedness,” and comfort that Soviet rule had brought to Central Asia, in aggregate they signaled philistine acquisitiveness, ill-gotten wealth, and detachment from the moral life of the community, filling the honest and simple Hikmatillo with an inexplicable “gloomy feeling.”

Hygienic discourses as colonial authority and subjective appeal. As is already evident, the definitions of culturedness offered in the Soviet Central Asian press were tightly wrapped up in a rhetoric of health, hygiene, and order, with those three concepts being frequently linked to and conflated with one another. Indeed, Khrushchev-era modernist values pertaining to the rational organization of space and the spatial separation of different daily functions within the interior – at times seemingly for purely aesthetic or principled reasons – were often described in terms of their alleged hygienic benefits. Separate beds for each family member, separate storage receptacles for functionally different objects, and separate rooms for different activities were all, writers for the local press claimed, mandated by the requirements of hygiene. As a 1976 Uzbek-language article explained, “According to the demands of hygiene [Russ. *gigiēna*], every person in the family should have a separate sleeping spot [Uzb. *o’rin-bosh*].”⁵⁹ “Every room of the house should be used in its own way,” lectured a Kyrgyz article

⁵⁸ Odil Yoqubov, “Billur qandillar,” *Saodat* no. 6 (Jun. 1975): 12.

⁵⁹ “Pokizalik – Tanisihatlik,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 31.

published in 1960. “It is not suitable to wash or dry clothing in the room for eating food or for sleeping, because the home’s interior will become damp and the climate will be ruined.”⁶⁰

On the one hand, this rhetoric mirrored the discourses on consumption and the domestic interior that were proliferating in the Soviet Russian press during the same period, which both stigmatized the supposedly unhygienic habits of the rural peasantry and linked aesthetic minimalism, functionalism, cleanliness and order with the qualities of culturedness and restraint befitting a Soviet person.⁶¹ On the other hand, it is impossible to miss the resemblance between these attacks on Central Asian material culture and the use of hygienic discourses in colonial contexts to stigmatize indigenous practices. In colonial and early Soviet contexts, historians have pointed to discourses of hygiene as tool for establishing state or professional authority over the local population and creating an ostensibly “scientific” metric for distinguishing civilization from backwardness and asserting the superiority of Europeanized ways of life.⁶² The special concern for imposing a visible spatial order on the household seems to have represented a curious point of overlap between Soviet and colonial regimes; in colonial South Africa too, as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff note, “The Europeans assumed one cardinal principle above all others: that the gauge of a civilized abode was the degree to which its interior spaces were rendered functionally specific and distinct.”⁶³ Likewise, official rhetoric that leveraged scientific and medical discourses to attack traditional Central Asian practices, including the veiling of women, as

⁶⁰ “Üydü zhasalgaloo zhönündö,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 2 (Feb. 1960), 24.

⁶¹ On authoritarian tendencies in Khrushchev-era discourses of consumption, Susan Reid explains: “The thaw, traditionally regarded as a period of liberalization, saw no liberalization of attitudes toward consumption and the domestic realm. On the contrary, intervention in the forms and practices of daily life was an essential aspect of the way the Khrushchev regime sought to maintain its authority and bring about the transition to communism.” Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 249.

⁶² Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 60-61.

⁶³ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1997), 277.

unhealthy and disease-causing represented a point of continuity between the pre-revolutionary period of imperial Russian rule and the early Soviet years.

To a certain extent, hygienic rhetoric became a justification for the Soviet state's invasive efforts to shape consumer choice, reframing what were essentially aesthetic and ideological preferences as public health concerns. In contrast to other Soviet efforts to guide consumption, the matter of hygiene was not left entirely to the realm of cultural "experts" and rhetorical pressure, but could be a subject of more direct state intervention as well. In 1946, a report by the Communist Party of the Kyrgyz SSR proposed a series of lectures and discussions on the topics "Comfort and cleanliness of the living space: The guarantee of human health" and "Hygiene in home life" as part of measures for "struggle with the phenomenon of feudal-clan survivals" in the republic.⁶⁴ Even during the Brezhnev period, rural collective farms in Central Asia continued to house special commissions that "regularly carry out checkups [*proverki*] of the sanitary condition of the kolkhozniks' homes," with "the best homes" being named as positive examples at a public meeting.⁶⁵ To be sure, by the post-war decades the heavy-handed utilization of hygienic rhetoric to specifically attack Central Asian material culture and advocate Europeanization had become less sweeping and indiscriminating; instead, it tended to target a handful of discrete traditional-style objects, and in general grew less pervasive in the local-language press by the Brezhnev-era 1970s. Nevertheless, it remains an unmistakable feature of the discourses of "cultured consumption" during this period.

Here the question of the role played by individual writers for the Central Asian press, the majority of whom, as mentioned above, were themselves not Russian but ethnically Central Asian, becomes especially pressing. In many cases, these writers spoke more from a position as "cultured" members of the local intelligentsia than from any particular professional expertise on fashion or interior

⁶⁴ TsGA PD KR F. 56, Op. 4, d. 589, 175.

⁶⁵ Abramzon, Simakov, and Firshtein, "Nov' kirgizskogo sela," 36-37.

décor: Izzat Sulton, a philologist, gave advice on “cultured” dress and street etiquette; Darkul Küiükova, an actress, critiqued the backwardness of rural Kyrgyz homes; G’afur G’ulom, one of Uzbekistan’s most prominent Soviet-era poets, weighed in on the balance between “new” and “old” in contemporary family life.⁶⁶ But aside from their role as figureheads of progressive Central Asianness, their articles on hygiene and culturedness in the local-language press combined an “insider’s” detailed knowledge of local experience with an “outsider’s” unrelenting, almost reflexive aversion toward certain local practices. How and why did this group of Central Asian members of the Soviet intelligentsia come to be the source of some of the most heavy-handed normative pressures toward Europeanization in the public discourse in the region, in fact urging considerably greater Europeanization of material culture than was anywhere demanded in official policy? Neither the personal histories nor the social dynamics surrounding the late Soviet Central Asian intelligentsia have received much in the way of academic study, but it is possible to imagine a few different explanations for this phenomenon. Perhaps the most obvious would be that local intellectuals and professionals were simply attempting to faithfully “localize” the rhetorical patterns that they witnessed in the Russian-language press – criticisms of rural ways of life, of excessive adornment of the interior, of traditional methods of caring for infants, and so on – filling in local detail as necessary but mirroring as closely as possible the original targets of critique, from hygiene in home décor to child-rearing practices. The “colonial” and paternalistic overtones of the Soviet press’s critiques of Central Asian culture are, after all, not entirely absent from contemporaneous criticisms of the Russian peasantry in the Russian-language press. Another alternative is that Central Asian professionals may have been responding in some way to the spirit and implied content of Moscow’s official rhetoric, particularly during the Khrushchev era, which tilted appreciably in a modernizing and Europeanizing direction without ever producing a concrete policy in favor of the

⁶⁶ Izzat Sulton, “Madaniy kishi,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 9 (Sep. 1959): 18-20; Küiükova, “Zhakshy zhashoo - zharkyn köngül üçün,” 20; G’afur G’ulom, “Ba’zi oilaviy gaplar,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 8 (Aug. 1960): 28-30.

Europeanization of Central Asian material culture (or even, as we have seen in Chapter 1, curtailing the state-sponsored production of Central Asian-style goods).

Nevertheless, the language of alienation and disgust that these Central Asian professionals applied to a certain subset of traditional practices remains quite striking. Intentionally or unintentionally, it served to sever any identification with those practices and draw a sharp line separating the writers, as members of the Soviet-aligned urban intelligentsia, from “uncultured” and “backward” – in most cases, rural – variants of Central Asianness. Undesirable consumption habits were not only presented as unhealthful and inconvenient, they were also irreducibly “ugly” or “unpleasant” (Uzb. *xunuk*). Whether such disgust was reflexive, signaling an already-existing cultural distance between the Russian-influenced milieu of urban intelligentsia circles and the Central Asian countryside, or more performative, intended to assert such a distinction with the goal of positioning the writer closer to the power and prestige of Europeanized all-Soviet culture, is a matter of speculation. Oral history interviews, discussed further in Chapter 5, suggest that it was not at all uncommon for self-identified members of the “Europeanized” Central Asian intelligentsia to sharply differentiate their tastes and values from those of their less-educated or more rural co-ethnics. As we shall see, many of them likewise aligned themselves with European culture and adopted a sort of “outsider’s” perspective to critique local life, complete with expressions of disbelief, visceral disgust, and moral reprobation.⁶⁷ Whatever the motives and intentions of individual writers, though, an aggregate effect of this emotionally charged hygienic rhetoric in the post-war Central Asian press was to re-inscribe and reinforce a sharp social, economic, and geographic (urban-rural) distinction within local society. The urban, Soviet-aligned intelligentsia represented themselves as proponents of a set of values and cultural allegiances that differentiated them from “backward,” “uncultured,” rural Central Asia and made them a vanguard of cultural transformation. To put it more pointedly, the attacks on Central Asian

⁶⁷ See Chapter 5.

backwardness in the local-language press cannot be fully understood as attacks by the “Soviet state” against “Central Asian society,” thought this dynamic is doubtless present. At least in part, they also constituted a struggle within Central Asian society to define the content of Central Asian ethnicity under modern conditions.

As a counterpart to the European-style objects that were treated as single-handed tokens of modernity in the Central Asian home, hygienic rhetoric in the local-language press consistently stigmatized a collection of indigenous Central Asian household objects as unsanitary, uncultured, and harmful regardless of the particulars of their use. These included the Uzbek *sandal* (a raised platform placed over a fire pit, used for heating homes in the winter) and *beshik* (a traditional-style cradle for infants). In a 1959 Soviet ethnographic study of Uzbek workers’ homes, the *sandal* was characterized as “harmful to the health and poorly heating the premises,” and the author pointed out that a worker’s home which was described as “modern, urban, and well-equipped” conspicuously lacked a *sandal*.⁶⁸ A 1952 satirical poem implicated the *sandal* in “abusing our grandfathers for their entire lives / bringing typhus, a thousand illnesses, and death,” and presented the European-style stove (Russ. *pechka*) as a more healthful alternative to this “remnant of the past [*eskilik sarqiti*].”⁶⁹ The *beshik* was the subject of an even more protracted negative campaign in the Uzbek-language press, once again centering on allegations of harm to health. Distinguished by a hole cut in its base to allow an infant to urinate while lying undisturbed, the *beshik* seems to have been regarded as an inherently and irretrievably unhygienic object in Soviet Central Asian discourse. In an early post-war satire, an Uzbek family’s comfortable prosperity and nominal commitment to a Communist “cultured life [*madaniy turmush*]” was contrasted ironically with the continued use of a *beshik* – in this case, decried for a propensity to attract insects.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ K.L. Zadykhina, “Etnograficheskie materialy o byte rabochikh-uzbekov Tashkenta i Andijana,” *Sredneaziatskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, t. 2 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959): 116.

⁶⁹ Tolib Yo’ldosh, “Sandalga xotima,” *Mushtum* no. 2 (Feb. 1952): 9.

⁷⁰ Image by D. Sinitskii, *Mushtum* (Nov. 1948): 2.



Figure 3.11. The *beshik* and cultured living. Caption: – “Husband, on your way home from work, pick up some sulfur to drive the bedbugs out of the *beshik*. They’re keeping Temurjon from sleeping.” – “I don’t have time. Tomorrow I have to lead a discussion on cultured living.” Source: Image by D. Sinitskii, *Mushtum* (Nov. 1948): 2.

An image shows the family seated in a luxuriously Europeanized living area, complete with chandelier and radio set, while the woman rocks a child swaddled in a traditional *beshik*. “Husband,” she requests, “on your way home from work, pick up some sulfur to drive the bedbugs out of the *beshik*. They’re keeping Temurjon from sleeping.” The husband replies, “I don’t have time, tomorrow I have to lead a discussion on cultured living” (Figure 3.11). Attacks on the *beshik* played on parental (and especially the mother’s) obligations to care for children, all but equating use of the *beshik* with disregard for a child’s well-being, even while the specific harms it was supposed to have caused remained ambiguous. One satire presented an infant fleeing from the *beshik* and chastising his mother in a poem with the refrain, “Prepare a silver bed [Russ. *krovat*] for me; I won’t lie in your *beshik*!”⁷¹ The poem, subtitled “An appeal

⁷¹ Charxiy, “Beshiginda yotmayman,” *Mushtum* no. 7 (Jul. 1952): 8.

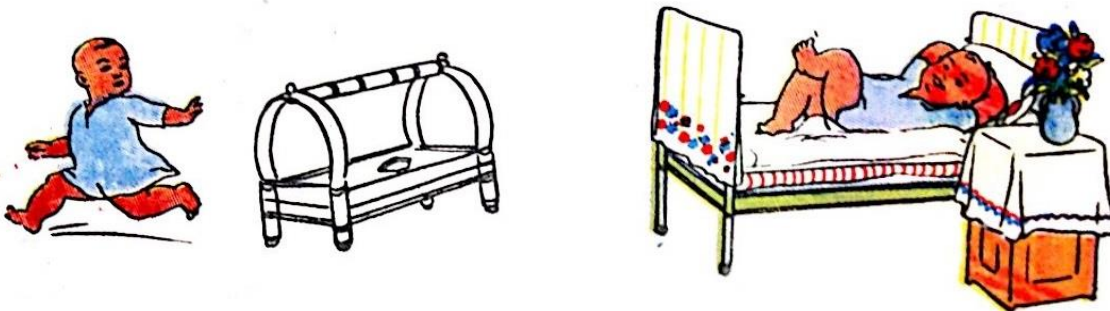


Figure 3.12. Illustrations accompanying the satirical poem “I won’t lie in your *beshik!*” Source: Charxiy, “Beshigingda yotmayman,” *Mushtum* no. 7 (Jul. 1952): 8.

to the mother,” cited the potential for infection with “hundreds of kinds of illnesses,” affliction with “sores,” the need for fresh air, and the “advice of doctors” as reasons to discard the *beshik* in favor of a European-style bed (Figure 3.12).

A similar hygienic logic was deployed, especially in the Kyrgyz-language press, to critique the possession of a large number of traditional soft furnishings – quilts, mattresses, pillows, carpets, and mats – in lieu of European-style tables, chairs, and beds. In Kyrgyzstan, the ownership of a large stack of such portable items, typically stored on top of an ornamented wooden chest (Kyrg. *sandyk*) opposite the entrance to the home, was associated with the nomadic past, when these objects, known collectively as the *zhük*, had adorned the interior of the nomadic yurt. Even during post-sedentarization Soviet times, some Kyrgyz families continued to find convenience in the movability of the *zhük*, which allowed great flexibility in rearranging small living spaces to serve different daily functions or to accommodate guests.⁷² The professional taste-makers writing for the Soviet Central Asian press, however, expressed ambivalence about this traditional feature of interior décor. On the one hand, it was not as

⁷² *Trudy Kirizskoi arkheologo-etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii t. 5: Narodnoe dekorativnoe-prikladnoe iskusstvo Kirgizov*, ed. S.V. Ivanov and K.I. Antipina (Izdatel'stvo “Nauka,” 1968), 30.

uncompromisingly condemned as items like the Uzbek *sandal* or *beshtik*. The individual items in the *zhük* fit into the general pattern of what the Soviet state endorsed under the rubric of “folk artistic crafts,” sewn from “national” fabrics and adorned with applique or embroidery.⁷³ A 1954 ethnographic study approvingly described the exceptional “artistic inventiveness” that Kyrgyz women brought to the decoration of their blankets and pillow cases, as a result of which “the *zhük* has a very bright and colorful appearance.”⁷⁴ But when the Khrushchev-era modernist aesthetic favoring hard surfaces and clean lines was at its peak influence, Central Asia’s traditional soft furnishings could be stigmatized as undesirable and uncultured, even independent of any associations with the nomadic past. After all, the Soviet press was attempting to root out “excessive” use of wall-hangings, carpets, and doilies among Russian consumers during these same years.⁷⁵ The fact that the same kinds of soft and heavily ornamented objects were being used in Central Asia even to the exclusion of “furniture” proper (itself denoted by the Russian-language borrow *mebel'*) was seen as especially un-modern. The press once again fell back on arguments about hygiene, citing the accumulation of dust and the difficulty of cleaning carpets and blankets as cause for their replacement by European-style hard furniture. A Kyrgyz article proposed, for instance, that a homeowner ought to “reduce her thirty or forty blankets [Kyrg. *zhuurkan*] by half and instead buy a wardrobe, cupboard, bed, dining table, writing table, and chairs” as a way of considerably alleviating the amount of housework required to keep her home tidy.⁷⁶

But although the rhetoric of health and cleanliness was perhaps most frequently deployed to critique local practices as retrograde “survivals of the past,” the local-language press once again sought

⁷³ See Chapter 1.

⁷⁴ S.M. Abramzon, “Proshloe i nastoiashchee kirgizskikh shakhterov Kyzyl-Kiia,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 4 (1954): 71-72.

⁷⁵ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern,” 227-268.

⁷⁶ Azharkan, “Madaniyattuuluktun dagy bir türü zhönündö,” 21.

to offer advice on how consumers might observe hygiene and rational order in their households without surrendering traditional practices or objects. A 1955 article explained that while the Uzbek practice of cooking food outdoors in the traditional walled courtyard (*hovli*) during the summer was not inherently unhygienic, “it is necessary to situate the kitchen in a place that does not get dusty and where the children do not play, to not sweep the courtyard while food is being prepared, and in this way to obey the rules of hygiene.”⁷⁷ A 1976 article titled “Cleanliness is health” did not recommend against traditional-style quilts and mattresses entirely, but advised Uzbek women to buy removable covers for their *ko’rpa*s – noting that such covers were available for purchase in Soviet shops – and to opt for *ko’rpa*s sewn from lightweight and washable materials like cotton rather than from the more delicate velvet or *atlas*.⁷⁸ Most surprisingly, Soviet experts repeatedly asserted that the form and material of traditional Central Asian women’s clothing, especially the loose-fitting Uzbek *ko’krak burma ko’ylak*, in fact made it uniquely healthful, hygienic, and suitable for the heat of the Central Asian summer. A 1968 *Saodat* article declared it “the dress most suitable to our climate,” and a 1971 report by the republic’s Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand praised its “simplicity and hygienicness,” positing that the spacious cut and lightweight fabric of the dress “protects the human organism from overheating.”⁷⁹ In a sense, such assertions could be read as an inversion of the Soviet hygienic discourses that treated Central Asian material culture as inherently harmful to the health; but in another sense, they preserved the process behind these discourses (utilizing medical and scientific language as a tool for the evaluation of consumer goods) even while inverting their outcomes (praising rather than denigrating objects of local material culture). The effect was simultaneously to place the stamp of official approval on certain

⁷⁷ Z. To’laganova, “Foydali maslahatlar: Uyda oshxonani qanday tutish kerak,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 5 (May 1955): 23.

⁷⁸ “Pokizalik – Tanisihatlik,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 31.

⁷⁹ “Yoshingiz qirqdan oshgach...,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1968), 31; TsGA RUz F. 2750, Op. 1N, d. 13, 54.

Central Asian objects and practices and to reinscribe the principles and rhetoric of hygiene into consumption discourses in the region.

Neither the vaguely colonial denigration of local traditions as unclean and disease-causing nor their vindication as specially adapted to the Central Asian climate fully exhausted the functions of hygienic rhetoric in the Soviet Central Asian press, however. Invocations of health and hygiene did not operate on a purely rationalist and scientific level, but sought to evoke more subjective and visceral responses in the reader as well. The hierarchical and authoritative functions of hygienic discourses, reminiscent of their use in colonial contexts, were by no means absent from the post-war Central Asian press, but they were accompanied by appeals on the level of aesthetics, social norms and expectations, and affect. Exhortations to observe rules of hygiene relied on graphically described images of squalor; on the moral obligation (especially of a Central Asian wife and mother) to create a beautiful and orderly home; on the social duty to provide a comfortable and pleasing environment for visiting guests; on the potential shame and humiliation of having the cleanliness of one's home scrutinized and criticized by a visiting neighbor. Unhygienic practices were not categorized as such only because they would ostensibly cause disease, but often because they resulted in sights and odors that the articles' writers identified as repulsive. Drying the dishes with a dirty towel, explained a 1957 *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* article, belongs to the category of "uncultured behaviors [*madaniatsizlyk*]" because "drinking tea from china that has been wiped with such a towel, there is a bad odor, and it turns your stomach."⁸⁰ The home of an especially negligent consumer was described in a 1960 Uzbek-language woman's journal in terms of "a certain wafting smell and dust" in the air, a cracked bowl, a table covered with dirty dishes being licked by a cat, and the buzzing of flies.⁸¹ The practice in the Surxondaryo and Qashqadaryo regions of Uzbekistan in which young women would wrap their heads in several layers of scarves even during the

⁸⁰ Azharkan, "Madaniyattuuluktun dagy bir türü zhönündö," 21.

⁸¹ Vohid Zohidov, "Go'zallik va zavq," *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 12 (Dec. 1960), 24.

hot summer was said to lead not only to “pain and diseases of the head” but also to “the hair falling out [and] a bad smell.”⁸² Among young rural Uzbek women who had newly arrived in the city, a 1976 article complained, there was a practice of continuing to wear the traditional-style *lozim* under their dresses but sewing silk stockings into the hem: “Because the stockings are silk, part of the *lozim* is visible, and the person noticing this feels irritated [*g’ashi keladi*]. Such women do not do this out of need or poverty, but out of tastelessness, unculturedness, and not knowing the norms of etiquette. This is a very unpleasant [*xunuk*] thing!”⁸³ The intention behind the deployment of these sensory details seems to have been less to impel Central Asian consumers to submit to the authority of state-backed experts than to mobilize consumers as agents of transformation in their own right who had internalized feelings of admiration for correct consumption practices and feelings of disgust for incorrect ones.

This visceral hygienic rhetoric served to bind Soviet concepts like culturedness, modernity, and good taste to a set of sensory experiences and affective associations that were both locally specific and, in some cases, intensely personal. A remarkable feature of the consumer advice discourse in local-language women’s journals is the degree to which it relied on depicting and criticizing, in a scandalized, gossipy tone, negative models of consumer behavior, often through a very direct sort of naming and shaming. “Mukash Akmatov always wears a wrinkled shirt with a dirty collar to his own school,” divulged *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary’s* 1957 article on culturedness and the rural intelligentsia. “Don’t these teachers understand that it is not only a teacher’s words that are an example to his students, but also his character and behavior?”⁸⁴ The proper rules of hygiene and household order were very frequently presented through accounts which scrutinized in agonizing detail the home interiors, daily habits, and manner of dress of specific, sometimes named individuals. Beyond merely instructing readers in correct

⁸² “Yaxshi va yomon odatlar,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 6 (Jun. 1965): 31.

⁸³ Mirzakalon Ismoilii, “Odob-Madaniyatning Ko’zgusi,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 21.

⁸⁴ Azharkan, “Madaniyattuuluktun dagy bir türü zhönüdü,” 21.

practices, the effect was to create an atmosphere of simulated mutual surveillance, in which incorrect consumption habits would be exposed for public criticism and ridicule.

Indeed, articles which offer up examples of consumer negligence for public critique seem to be narratively designed to create intense vicarious discomfort in the reader. They frequently aligned themselves with the gaze of a guest or an outside observer, reinforcing the sense that the domestic interior or improperly dressed body constituted a space of public interest and community concern. “If you use perfectly clean [*top-toza*] sheets, *ko’rpa* covers, and pillowcases when guests come,” a 1976 Uzbek article advised, “you will show your guests respect. Doing this, you will, first, give evidence of your culturedness and cleanliness, and second, spare the person who lies on the *ko’rpa* the annoyance of thinking, ‘I wonder who slept on this *ko’rpa* before me.’”⁸⁵ The specter of a displeased or repulsed guest is constantly present, linking the normative assessments offered by Soviet-aligned experts on hygiene and taste with the expectations of an individual’s Central Asian neighbors and local community. The stakes were raised even further in articles where the article-writer was a prestigious or well-known figure who proceeded to dissect the taste, culturedness, and cleanliness of the domestic interiors into which they had been invited as guests. The 1972 attack on rural philistinism and backwardness in *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* was written by one of Kyrgyzstan’s most prominent film and theater actresses, Darkül Küiükova, and signed with her title “People’s Artist of the USSR.” Her description of the interior of the first home conveys unconcealed distaste; recall her comment that the numerous carpets and traditional-style embroideries “must not have been touched by a human hand for months or years” and her recoiling at the “dust and smell of age” in the air. The glowing appraisal of the second shepherd’s home, which included “a room specially designated for guests” in which “a small plate, spoon, knife and fork was set out for each person,” only served to emphasize the extent to which the first homeowner

⁸⁵ “Pokizalik – tanisihatlik,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 31.

had failed in his obligations before his guests.⁸⁶ It is notable that both European-style goods (like a full set of cutlery for each guest) and locally specific goods (like washable covers for Uzbek *ko'rpas*) could be praised for facilitating hospitality and the comfort of guests within this rhetoric.

On one level, the airing of such personal and embarrassing details in nationally circulated journals was predicated on the premise that consumption was not a private affair, but a matter of public morality and social responsibility. This notion seems to have been fueled equally by the Khrushchev-era state's push for social self-policing and by the routine social surveillance practiced in tightly knit Central Asian village and mahalla communities.⁸⁷ On another level, the personalization of these otherwise abstract rules of consumer behavior seems, again, to have been a method for drawing in emotional investment among Central Asian readers. By creating linkages between correct consumption habits and values that the reader may have already shared – a beautiful and convenient household, care for children, hospitable accommodation of guests – the hygienic discourses in the Soviet Central Asian press sought to draw out identification with these terms of state rhetoric among Central Asian consumers. Conversely, the intense negative attention that the local-language press devoted to examples of incorrect consumption habits seems calibrated to link Soviet rhetoric of “backwardness” and “unculturedness” to feelings of personal embarrassment and shame.

Gender, consumption, and feminine virtue. Beyond their role in establishing the authority of Soviet “experts” and asserting the superiority of European-style material culture and practices, then, the principles of culturedness, taste, and hygiene advocated in the Central Asian-language press were

⁸⁶ Küiükova, “Zhakshy zhashoo – zharkyn köngül üchün,” 20.

⁸⁷ Juliane Furst, “The Arrival of Spring? Changes and continuities in Soviet youth culture and policy between Stalin and Khrushchev,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (New York: Routledge, 2006), 142-148; Eric W. Sievers, “Uzbekistan's Mahalla: From Soviet to Absolutist Residential Community Associations,” *The Journal of International and Comparative Law at Chicago-Kent* vol. 2 (2002): 91-158.

woven into two subjects of practical concern that were as much local as official in origin: the reception of guests and the proper care of children. These concerns did not merely serve as a Trojan horse for slipping Soviet values into the local press; they also, intentionally or not, reinforced the paramount importance of child-rearing and guest-greeting activities, and, what is more, reinforced the notion that these were activities for which the primary responsibility lay with women. Women were consistently assumed to be the main audience for discussions about consumption in the Central Asian press. Both announcements of new varieties of household consumer goods available in Soviet shops and advice about fashion or the proper arrangement of the home interior tended to address women directly. Of course, the disproportionate attention to women within consumption discourses was unique neither to Central Asia nor to the Soviet Union more generally. On one level, it represented another local variation on an all-Soviet pattern, reproducing the gendered expectations and norms that underlay Soviet consumption discourses. On the other hand, it adheres to a pattern that was commonplace globally in the 20th century, in which both positive and negative images of the consumer – the conscientious homemaker on the one hand, and the fashion- and cosmetics-obsessed “modern girl” on the other – tended to be gendered female, and consumption was imagined as a predominantly feminine sphere of activity.⁸⁸ Both of these contradictory images of women consumers coexisted within the consumption discourses of Soviet Central Asia: women as rational and conscientious “citizen-consumers” responsible for buying the necessary goods for their families and households, and women (particularly young women) as voracious consumers of fashion and frivolity whose inability to resist the lure of new products would serve as a destabilizing force in the family and community.

⁸⁸ Mary Louise Roberts, “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture” *The American Historical Review* 103/3 (Jun. 1998): 817-844; Emily S. Rosenberg, “Consuming Women: Images of Americanization in the ‘American Century,’” *Diplomatic History* 23/3 (Summer 1999): 479-497; Victoria de Grazia, ed., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*; Alys Weinbaum, et al., eds, *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Within the Soviet context specifically, the trope of women as the primary consumers in the household was reinforced, in a somewhat roundabout way, by the state's efforts to cultivate gender equality in terms of public life and workforce participation while maintaining a pro-natalist policy that urged women to bear more children.⁸⁹ The resulting "double burden" on women as both wage-earners and child-bearers did not go unremarked upon in official rhetoric. It was a topic of particular concern to the party in Central Asia, where women's participation in the workforce remained low in comparison with Russia, and where marriage, child-rearing, and the burdens of housework were commonly cited as reasons for women's high rates of attrition from public work and higher education.⁹⁰ Yet the Soviet state's proposed solution to this problem was rooted less in equalizing the burden of domestic labor between husband and wife than in transferring that burden onto a combination of state-provided services and labor-saving consumer goods. As Elizabeth Constantine observes, by the late Stalin era, the accepted Soviet approach to gender equality involved the attempt to construct "a system which enabled women to combine paid work with motherhood using paid maternity leave, maternity benefits, and a network of creches and nurseries."⁹¹ But consumer goods were roped into this rhetoric as well. The availability of technologies that would "ease the domestic labor of women," including "sewing machines, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines," was framed as a crucial factor in achieving true gender equality, allowing women to function both as mothers and as full participants in Soviet public life.⁹² A cartoon in the journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* even fancifully imagined the utopian

⁸⁹ Mie Nakachi, "Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union, 1944-1955," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2008).

⁹⁰ K. Fayzulin, "Prervannaia svad'ba," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 10 Dec. 1953. A "discussion" between prominent female Uzbek poet Zulfiya and readers' letters, published in the literary journal *Zvezda Vostoka* in 1952, addressed these issues. Zulfiya, "Razgovor s podrugami," *Zvezda Vostoka* no. 7 (Jul. 1952): 60-70.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Constantine, "Public Discourse and Private Lives: Uzbek Women Under Soviet Rule, 1917-1991," Ph.D. Dissertation (Indiana University: 2001), 117.

⁹² *Postanovleniia Soveta Ministrov SSSR i Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1953), 29; *Pervyi s'ezd zhenshchin Uzbekistana, 7-8 marta 1958 goda: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Tashkent, 1959), 145.

future of the trend of “mechanization of household labor,” showing one Kyrgyz woman’s housework being carried out entirely by helpful robots – vacuuming the floor, serving a meal, even pushing a baby in a stroller and brushing a young girl’s hair – while she is able to engage in cultured pursuits like reading a book.⁹³ Text accompanying the image linked its idealized future to the 1961 Communist Party program and its promise to ease the burden of women’s household labor (Figure 3.13).

The problem was, of course, that a framework which positioned women as the primary beneficiaries of the Soviet production of household consumer goods only reinforced the rhetoric that positioned them as the members of the family with the greatest responsibility for household labor. They were the “architects of home life,” as a 1967 Kyrgyz article put it, bearing the burden of furnishing, cleaning, and managing the household.⁹⁴ The pleasures of consumption went hand-in-hand with the obligations of housekeeping as dimensions of women’s particular domestic purview. Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that in Soviet Russia, as well, “It was generally acknowledged in the 1930s that women had a right and even an obligation to value material possessions, because they were the keepers of the family hearth.”⁹⁵ In spite of the Soviet state’s nominal commitment to gender equality, gendered stereotypes and assumptions played a role in this rhetoric, as another Kyrgyz-language article makes clear: “Doubtless, compared to a man, a woman is more attentive to the décor of the home’s interior. She says, ‘Let our home have the best things.’”⁹⁶ In Central Asia, this all-Soviet set of assumptions was folded into a locally specific set of gendered norms that remained strong through the post-war period, and may have even experienced something of a revitalization and reaffirmation within post-war consumption discourses. The expectation that the new bride (*kelin*) would take on responsibility for

⁹³ *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1961).

⁹⁴ Asanbek Tabaldiev, “Üy turmushunun arkhitektorloru,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1967): 13.

⁹⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1992), 231.

⁹⁶ Tügölbai Sydykbekov, “Eng asyl bailyk – ynsap!,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 7 (Jul. 1978): 13.

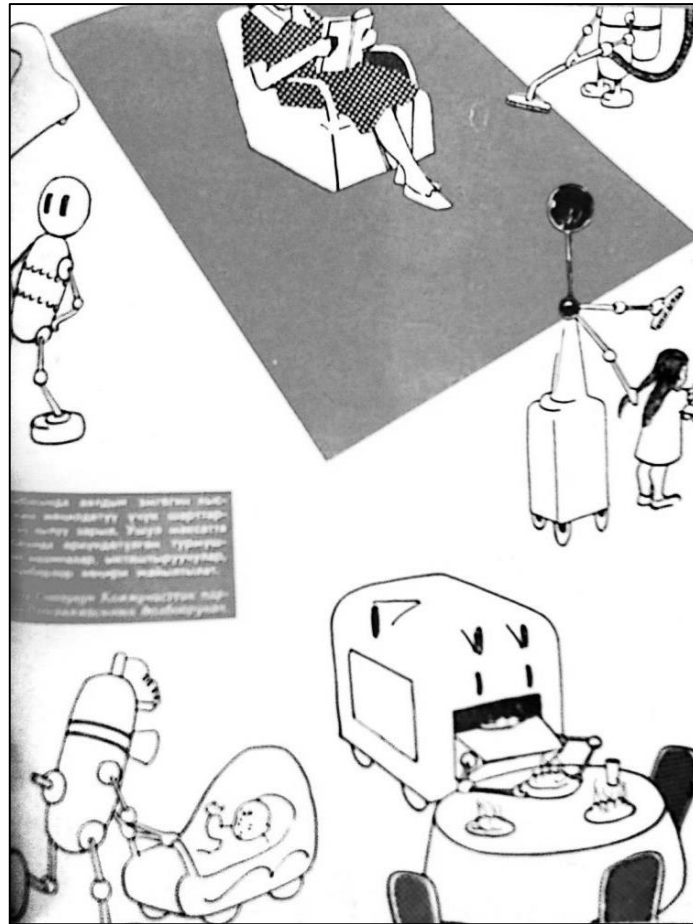


Figure 3.13. The utopian future of the mechanization of domestic labor. Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1961).

menial domestic tasks within the household of her husband's family, for example, became tethered to ostensibly Soviet virtues of industriousness, politeness, and deference to elders (see Chapter 4). A series of articles in the Uzbek-language women's journal *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* in 1959-1960 unabashedly affirmed the gendered ideal of the *kelin* as compatible with modern Soviet life, praising young women who were "polite and respectful," "humble," "cheerful," and "industrious," and expressing alarm at the

growing trend of “spoiled” *kelins* who “know nothing of housework,” “cook flavorless gruel in place of *palov*,” and “had apparently never washed [their] own clothing.”⁹⁷

The unfortunate corollary of the presumption that women were the masters of home life, then, was that the blame for a poorly kept house, an improperly furnished interior, or a badly dressed child would fall disproportionately on them as well. If this tendency to apply harsh normative pressures to women who failed to fulfill their traditional domestic roles was rooted in pre-existing social dynamics and cultural assumptions as much as in official policy, it was only bolstered by the constant repetition of these assumptions in the post-war Soviet Central Asian press. In one revealing example, a 1960 article in *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* described the disarray in the home of a certain family: air permeated by dust and an unpleasant odor, unwashed and chipped dishes alongside an excess of expensive and impractical velvet quilts (*ko‘rpas*) and silk pillows, a child with a dirty face and clothes. The author concluded by asking rhetorically, “Can we call this woman beautiful, who knows nothing of work, who wouldn’t notice if the world was washed away by water, who thinks that life’s meaning consists only of idleness?”⁹⁸ No woman had been mentioned previously in the account, but the link between household chaos, poor hygiene, improper purchasing decisions, and neglected children on the one hand, and a woman’s dereliction of duty on the other, was assumed to be self-evident. The article, like much of the rhetoric surrounding the Central Asian *kelin* and women’s domestic responsibility during this period, seeks to establish a link between the Soviet virtue of industriousness and the value placed on women as house-keepers and child-rearers within Central Asian communities, equating the failure to keep a neat and orderly household with the Soviet sin of “idleness.” This rhetorical move served simultaneously to conflate, or at least to point to common ground between, Central Asian and Soviet moralities, and to double down on the moral demands made on women as consumers. Significantly, the woman’s

⁹⁷ “Xatingizni kutamiz,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 2 (Feb. 1960): 28-29.

⁹⁸ Vohid Zohidov, “Go‘zallik va zavq,” *O‘zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 12 (Dec. 1960): 24.

obligation to maintain a well-ordered home interior is directly linked here to her maternal responsibilities. “The tragedy is not just the ugly and pitiful state that this woman’s house is in currently,” the writer laments. “The most horrible thing is that these qualities in the woman and the state of her house exert a very ugly, very bad and bitter influence on her children and their upbringing.” As in the case of the *beshtik*, the stakes were not limited to state-endorsed, regulatory concepts like culturedness and hygiene, but were framed in terms of personally and locally resonant values, tethering their moral and emotional weight to Soviet Central Asian discourses of appropriate consumption.

If women were positioned in Soviet Central Asian rhetoric as the wives, mothers, and *kelins* who bore primary responsibility for household order, they were simultaneously depicted as especially vulnerable to the allure of frivolous fashion, materialism, and consumerism. The above-cited Kyrgyz article pointing to women’s particular interest in home décor and the acquisition of “the best things” also offered a cautionary tale describing the consequences when such feminine proclivities were taken too far. The writer introduces a particular family from Naryn oblast and notes that while the husband, Kelgenbek, could be considered a “good person,” his wife, Batyikan, was an “envious, miserly” woman: “If she sees a new product or expensive clothing in someone’s house, she won’t sleep that day.” Seeing a beautiful carpet in a neighbor’s house, she asked her husband to buy the same thing, saying, “Are we any worse than the others?” When her husband pointed out that she already owned three carpets and should be contented, she ignored him and instead “borrowed money from everybody and bought the same carpet.”⁹⁹ Women’s special concern for creating a beautiful and comfortable home filled with “the best things” – “a good and suitable goal,” the article points out – could, without restraint and proper guidance, lead to the sort of excessive, irrational consumption that was feared in Soviet rhetoric, leading to mishandled finances, insatiable desires, and a love of goods unconstrained by propriety, conscientiousness, and social responsibility.

⁹⁹ Tügölbai Sydykbekov, “Eng asyl bailyk – ynsap!,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 7 (Jul. 1978): 13.

In the realm of fashion, female consumers were both assumed to be more innately interested in questions of beauty and more susceptible to the influences of changing fashion than men, and Soviet women's journals offered fashion advice both in the spirit of providing a helpful service for readers and as fulfilling a regulatory function. The pursuit of fashion was not in itself disparaged; both official rhetoric and the local press even encouraged it up to a point, positing the desire to dress fashionably as a sign of culturedness and refinement. A 1973 Soviet report on consumer behavior in the Kyrgyz SSR noted approvingly, "With the steady growth of the material and cultural level of the population, the people's tastes and needs are becoming more diverse," making attention to "the factors of quality and correspondence with contemporary fashion" increasingly important in the Kyrgyz population's clothing purchasing decisions. "Fashion is a real fact of social life which must be taken into account," the report concludes.¹⁰⁰ In articles that would not have been out of place in women's magazines in the West, "experts" like the director of Kyrgyzstan's House of Fashions (*Dom modelei*) were more than happy to answer reader's questions like, "How should one choose suitable fabrics?", "How should full-figured women dress?", and "How have fashions for clothing changed this year?"¹⁰¹ Once again, the Soviet attitude toward consumption proved not to be oriented solely to restraining consumer desire, but also to channeling it in particular directions.

At the same time, however, discussions of women's fashions in the Central Asian press frequently took on a cautionary tone. "The art of knowing how to dress requires extreme deftness, care, and guidance," stated a 1958 advice piece by the docent of Kyrgyzstan State University.¹⁰² As with consumption more generally, the disruptive potential (both economically and socially) of uninhibited fashion-seeking required supervision and restraint, provided by means of expert guidance in the

¹⁰⁰ TsGA KR F. 1576, Op. 1N, d. 22, 8-9.

¹⁰¹ Z. Kachkynova, "Zharashyktuu kiyinuu zhönündö," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 6 (Jun. 1966): 23-24.

¹⁰² Beishegül Umetalieva, "Suluuluk zhönündö," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1958): 10.

principles of moderation, practicality, neatness, and the amorphous “good taste.” “Knowing how to dress with taste is a sign of a person’s culturedness,” stated an article tellingly titled “Moderation is beauty” (Me’yor go’zallikdir). But this did not mean “getting dressed up beyond all measure” or “blindly follow[ing] every new trend,” but instead selecting clothing “suitable to one’s age, body type, and appearance.”¹⁰³

Beyond mere personal “suitability” and functionality, though, the Central Asian press also linked women’s dress to social responsibility. In particular, many articles asserted that women bore a responsibility for dressing in ways that would not be distracting or upsetting to those around them – a community that was typically defined as a distinctly Central Asian one. Once again, the local press found a point of overlap between all-Soviet and distinctly local values which seemed to call for intense scrutiny of and efforts to restrain and direct women’s consumption decisions. “Street clothes should have a simple and streamlined style [so that] they will attract little attention from those around you [*atrofidagilarning diqatini kam jalb qildi*],” argued a 1966 article.¹⁰⁴ In fact, in the realm of women’s fashion, the official guidance that existed not only failed to contradict traditionalist expectations of female modesty, but could become a kind of back door for bringing traditionalist values from the family or mahalla sphere into a public, Soviet forum. The characteristic Soviet appeal for consumers to exercise moderation and “good taste” could shade imperceptibly into a specifically Central Asian critique of female immodesty. While not sounding at all out of place in the Soviet discourse of “cultured” consumption, the language and imagery accompanying criticisms of female *stiliagi* (style-seeking youth) in the Soviet Central Asian press made the exposure of female flesh into the primary issue, signifying personal immorality as well as social chaos. One satirical poem in Uzbek published on this topic, unsubtly titled “Why are you not ashamed before us? A question to some *stiliaga* girls,”

¹⁰³ Dilbar Qambarova, “Me’yor go’zallikdir,” *Saodat* no. 2 (Feb. 1979): 26.

¹⁰⁴ “Ko’chalik libosingiz,” *Saodat* no. 7 (Jul. 1966): 32.

decries the degenerate female subject's partially exposed breasts, mini skirt, and disarrayed hair.¹⁰⁵ As we shall see in Chapter 4, the desire to regulate women's dress often possessed an ethnic and cultural as well as a sexual component. In the document of Kyrgyzstan State University's 1958 article on fashion, the immodest appearance (a short red dress, blue stockings, and heeled black shoes) and behavior of a young woman is implied to call not only her sexual morality but also her ethnic belonging into question: "Even though she was Kyrgyz, she flashed her eyebrows and eyes coquettishly, speaking Russian [özü Kyrgyz bolso da, kashty serpip, közdü süzüb oruschalab süilöp], as if to say, 'Is there anyone as beautiful as me?'"¹⁰⁶ In this case, the Soviet critique of dissolute excess, so often aimed at *stiliagi* in Russia as well as in Central Asia, becomes nearly indistinguishable from the critique of young women straying from a culturally ordained Central Asian gender norm.

Formulating Soviet Central Asian "good taste": Positive models of hybrid consumption

Given the complicated and at times internally inconsistent rhetoric of the Central Asian-language Soviet press, what positive models could consumers actually draw upon when making decisions about home décor, household objects, or clothing? Here there was a significant chronological shift over the course of the post-war period, following the general trajectory described in Chapter 2 for discussions of folk art. In the local-language press of the late Stalin and Khrushchev years, it was not unusual to find writers advocating for near-total Europeanization of Central Asian consumption habits. Even those who made specific allowances for Central Asian material culture often assumed that local specificities would disappear over time as part of a natural historical process of modernization and Europeanization. But by the Brezhnev period, positions that imagined a lasting or potentially even permanent place for Central Asian ethnic specificity, which had appeared intermittently in earlier

¹⁰⁵ Fathiddin Nasriddinov, "Nega Bizdan Uyalmayisiz? Ba'zi stilyaga qiz-juvonlarga savol," *Mushtum* no. 6 (May 1971): 10.

¹⁰⁶ Emphasis added. Beishegül Umetalieva, "Suluuluk zhönündö," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1958): 10.

periods, had grown increasingly powerful, even dominant. In a broad sense, the local-language press grew increasingly sanguine about models of consumption that could be called “hybrid,” blending the use of European-style goods with national-style ones, or blending markers of ethnic distinctiveness with “modern” forms and principles of arrangement. This ideal of a simultaneously “modern” and “national” consumer hinged on the elaboration of a particularly Central Asian brand of the Soviet principles of culturedness, hygiene, and good taste.

In the realm of women’s fashion, efforts to integrate local Central Asian elements into dress suitable for a “modern” Soviet person had already begun during the Khrushchev years. Even in the 1950s and early 1960s, in some of the earliest issues of the Uzbek- and Kyrgyz- language Soviet women’s journals, the pages devoted to “new fashions” often featured clothing that incorporated uniquely Central Asian shapes, textiles, or ornamentation. The Uzbek *ko’krak-burma ko’ylak*, a dress with a pleat along the bust dropping into a flowing, voluminous silhouette, became a particularly ubiquitous fixture of post-war Soviet Central Asian fashion, though over time its sleeves were shortened and its hemline was raised to just below the knee to match with the norm for European-style dresses of the same period (Figure 3.14). “Some people think that the Uzbek-style dress [*o’zbekcha ko’ylak*] does not allow designers the opportunity to create new and beautiful styles,” wrote the artistic director of the Tashkent House of Fashion in a 1955 issue of *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari*. But the House of Fashion’s designers had proven this supposition wrong, she said, by creating variants on the *ko’krak burma* dress that included short sleeves and long sleeves, different styles of collars, and striped, embroidered, appliqued, or patterned silk cloth.¹⁰⁷ In Kyrgyzstan, as well, a 1962 women’s journal featured, alongside less traditional items like overalls for women laborers, models of a “*kemsel* [Kyrgyz traditional jacket] sewn in Kyrgyz style” and “a new type of dress and *chypstama* [Kyrgyz traditional vest] sewn in Kyrgyz style.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Yelena Aksyuk, “Modalar,” *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 7 (Jul. 1955): 23.

¹⁰⁸ “Modalar,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 3 (Mar. 1962).



Figure 3.14. Changes in styles of the *ko'krak burma ko'ylak* from 1958 to 1966. Sources: Left – “Modalar,” *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 7 (Jul. 1958). Right – “Yangi liboslar,” *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 4 (Apr. 1966).

Some Soviet designers even sought to integrate the motifs of Central Asian folk crafts into clothing of more distinctly modern cut, adding what is described as “Kyrgyz ornamentation” to a short cinched-waist wool dress or a strip of Kyrgyz-style embroidery to a women’s pantsuit.¹⁰⁹ The distinctive Uzbek *atlas* cloth and its striking black-and-white *xonatlas* variant were widely recommended in both authentic

¹⁰⁹ “Zhangy modalar,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdaryno*. 9 (Sep. 1966), 24; “Kyz-kelinder uchün shym kostium,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 11 (Nov. 1976).

and facsimile form (with the design printed on crepe-de-chine rather than woven into silk) for use in contemporary women's fashions (Figure 3.15).¹¹⁰



Figure 3.15. Fashions blending “national” and “European” features.

Left: The short wool dress on the left of the image is described in the accompanying text as being adorned with a strip of “Kyrgyz ornamentation.” Source: *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 9 (Sep. 1966): 24.

Right: A dress made from Uzbek *xonatlas* silk with “European” styling, including an open neckline and a cinched waist, in contrast to the form of the “national” *ko’krak burma ko’ylak*. Source: S. Makhkamova, “Uzbekskie tkani segodnia,” *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* no. 2 (Feb. 1963): 34.

¹¹⁰ “Yangi liboslar,” *Saodat* no. 5 (May 1969): 30-31.

While the practice of folding local elements into Soviet-designed fashions emerged early in the post-war period, a 1967 Uzbek-language article titled “Clothing suitable for our time” was unique in offering an explicit justification for this practice. The writer, a specialist of art history in the Uzbek Academy of Sciences named Sayyora Mahkamova, raised three main points. First, she described the availability of national-style clothing as a component of the consumerist abundance and multiplicity of choices that the late Soviet economy, under the guidance of “internationalist” Soviet policy, had created for Central Asian consumers. In the present, she said, “Each of us can love and wear European-style [*evropacha tikilgan*] clothing fitting close to the body, from whatever material our heart desires, or else wear national-style [*milliy*] clothing. Both of them give us a feeling of freedom, both of them are suitable, and both of them reflect the international spirit of people of our time.” Second, she appealed to the principles of functionality and hygiene that had prevailed in Khrushchev-era consumer advice, positing a sort of division of labor in which European-style clothing was regarded as most suitable for winter months while “national dresses” were said to be superior in the summer heat. Finally, and most characteristically of the Brezhnev-era discourse that would develop over the following years, she appealed to “tradition” as a value in itself. Like proponents of Central Asian folk artistic crafts during the same period, she envisioned a kind of poetic and affective link between indigenous material culture, the people’s unique cultural values, and the historical experience of the nation: “The works of the people are various and eternal [*xalq ijodi xilma-xil va o’lmasdir*]. Their best examples, reflecting the spirit of the people, the authentic works that fulfill the people’s needs, are passed from generation to generation, from era to era, turning into traditions [*an’anaga aylanib ketadi*].”¹¹¹ Because the aesthetic sense and creative works of the Uzbek people were “eternal,” Mahkamova suggested, it was not a contradiction to describe the *ko’krak burma ko’ylak* sewn from multicolored *atlas* silk as clothing “suitable for our time.”

¹¹¹ Sayyora Mahkamova, “Libos – davriga mos,” *Saodat* no. 4 (Apr. 1967): 28-29.

The sharp Brezhnev-era spike in interest in Central Asian folk traditions is even more noticeable in discussions of Kyrgyz interior décor. By the late 1970s, renewed interest in Kyrgyz decorative arts had led to a rehabilitation of the traditional decorative elements of the yurt, including the previously dubious soft furnishings of the *zhük*. The beginnings of a shift on this question were visible in 1967, when an article in *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* praised the decorative arts associated with the nomadic yurt as a repository both of national tradition and of women's unique forms of artistic expression and craftsmanship: "All adornments of the yurt [Kyrg. *boz üy*]... are the work of women, women's art, women's labor. They are the reflection of countless women's intellect and talent. They have their own style, their own form, and their own law... It is necessary to view the yurt not simply as a living space, but as belonging to the most wonderful cultural heritage of our people." Nevertheless, the author warned that even while it was proper to use traditional textile goods like *tush-kiyiz*, *shyrdaks*, and *zhuurkan* in the home, "it is necessary to regard them not alone as before, but alongside the industrial way and new system of decoration."¹¹² A decade later, another writer suggested a more specific way of merging the "national" with the "modern" while preserving "the Kyrgyz people's methods of hand craftsmanship that have been passed down over generations from father to son and mother to daughter," in the form of a spatial division between rooms of the house decorated in the national style (with *shyrdaks*, *ala-kiyiz*, and *zhuurkan*) and those decorated in European style. "If there are many rooms and one is decorated according to national traditions [*eldik satta zhasalgalap koiso*]," the article stated, "it will be very satisfactory."¹¹³ (Such a spatial division of the interior, as we shall see in Chapter 5, was in fact practiced by many Central Asians during the late Soviet period.) As in discussions of Uzbek women's clothing, this uniquely Kyrgyz "heritage" was described in increasingly reverent tones over time. A 1981 article of that title praised the ornamentation of the traditional Kyrgyz *shyrdak*, in which

¹¹² Asanbek Tabaldiev, "Üy turmushunun arkhitektorum," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1967): 13.

¹¹³ M. Abdykerimova, "Zhashagan zhaidy zhasalgalai bileli," *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1977): 23.

“the Kyrgyz people’s ancient history is beautifully reflected.”¹¹⁴ Most conspicuously, over the course of 1978, the journal ran a series of articles extolling the virtues of the Kyrgyz crafts associated with the nomadic lifestyle of the yurt. The express intention, as the article dealing with embroideries stated, was to explain to the modern consumer how to “add today’s new décor to the eternal décor of the yurt [*böz üy*], which was erected by our fathers and grandfathers, who lived in it and carried it with them on their wanderings.”¹¹⁵

In Uzbekistan, where traditional practices of interior décor had never been subject to quite as much stigma as they had in Kyrgyzstan, there was nevertheless a similar late Soviet trajectory toward arguments in favor of the self-conscious integration of the “modern” and the “national.” Again, however, even as locally specific “tradition” could increasingly be framed as a value in itself, it often supplemented rather than replaced the principles of culturedness, hygiene, and Khrushchev-era aesthetic minimalism that characterized Soviet discourses of appropriate consumption more broadly. In 1966, a particularly inventive Uzbek architect, Yulduz Zokirova, sought to devise a kind of Central Asian variant of what Susan Reid describes as the “Khrushchev Modern” aesthetic, adopting its fundamental principles but modifying its specifics to accommodate the use of a low Uzbek table (*xontaxta*) in the dining room. She began by tackling the “modern” requirement of a separate seat for each guest in the absence of European-style chairs: “In place of the *ko’rpacha* [a quilt traditionally laid out for seating around the *xontaxta*], you can use thick quilts shaped into cushions for each person separately.” Next, she addressed the problem of hygiene and cleanliness: “If you hang a smooth, lacquered board or a thin carpet on the side of the wall, the back of the seated person won’t get covered in paint residue and the wall won’t lose its whiteness.” Finally, she advised a strategy for maintaining a modernist sense of brightness and airiness in the space: “It is best to hang the light over the table and a bit lower [i.e.,

¹¹⁴ Sh. Abdrakhmanova, “Muras...,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 11 (Nov. 1981): 21.

¹¹⁵ Batyi Karachova, “Saimachylyk,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 6 (Jun. 1978): 22.

closer to the low *xontaxta*] rather than from the center of the ceiling. This way the faces of those sitting will be well lit.”¹¹⁶ As the sketch accompanying this article conveys, the use of traditional Uzbek furnishings did not have to entail dark, crowded, dusty spaces, but could, with proper expert guidance, create an interior that met the requirements of a “streamlined,” “convenient,” modern home while maintaining both visual markers of ethnic distinctiveness and the material prerequisites for culturally specific practices (Figure 3.16).

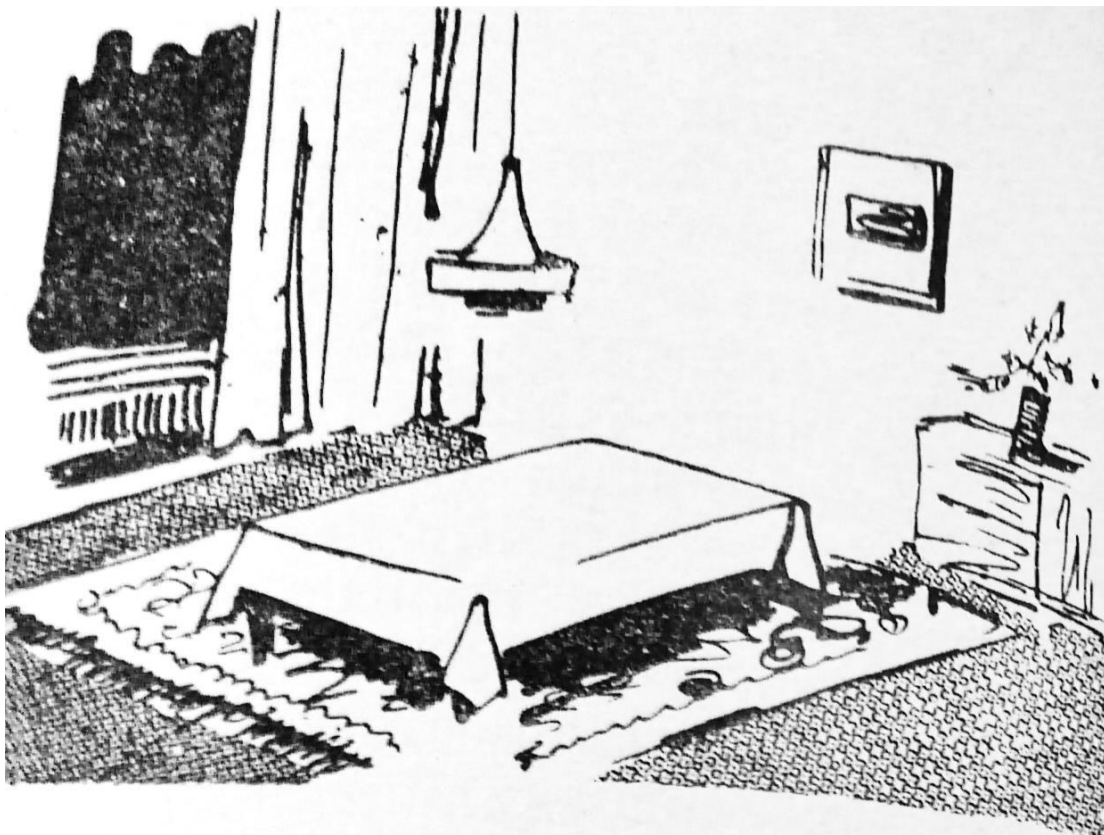


Figure 3.16. Sketch of a modernist Uzbek home interior. The plan merges traditional floor seating with clean, sparse, surfaces and a ceiling lamp hanging low over the *xontaxta* (Uzbek-style table) to keep the space brightly illuminated. Source: Yulduz Zokirova, “Shinamlik – soddalikda,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1966): 32-33.

¹¹⁶ Yulduz Zokirova, “Shinamlik – soddalikda,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1966): 32-33.

A 1976 article went further still, presenting the *xontaxta* as a “cultured” object in its own right. The writer observed that the continued practice in some families of laying out the meal on a felt mat (*namat*) or rug placed on the floor might lead to undesirable behaviors: “While eating or drinking tea, people sit cross-legged and hunched over, and some, who do not know to sit cross-legged, instead eat while stretching their legs out or lying on one side. Viewed from the outside, this is very unpleasant, and an indication of unculturedness [*juda xunuk va madaniyatsizlikning o’zginasidir*].”¹¹⁷ The article mentions in passing that the family could buy a European-style table and chairs (*stol* and *stul*) to rectify this problem. But the author also added that they might instead acquire a *xontaxta*, cover it with a plastic tablecloth to keep it clean and free of dust, and sit around it either on *ko’rpachas* or on low benches. In this example, both the symptom of “unculturedness” [Uzb. *madaniyatsizlik*] itself – a person lying on his or her side to drink tea – and one of the solutions proposed – sitting around a traditional *xontaxta* rather than a *namat* – were grounded in local experiences and local material culture.

Conclusion

The professional advice and didactic guidance offered to ethnically Central Asian consumers through the medium of the local-language press represents a complicated mix of Europeanizing and particularizing tendencies. Although the trend swung in the direction of a greater accommodation of local specificity over the course of the late Soviet period, praise for the convenience and beauty of European-style goods never entirely disappeared from print, and the answers experts offered to the question of how to reconcile Central Asianness with modernity were multiple and often contradictory. At times, the relationship was presented as an evolutionary one, in which Central Asians were required to shed the markers of their backwardness – the *sandal*, the *beshik*, the *zhük* – in order to enter into the “international” community of modern, Soviet citizens. Elsewhere, the prerogatives of Soviet

¹¹⁷ S. Hasanov, “Oila davrasida,” *Saodat* no. 11 (Nov. 1976): 28.

nationalities policy were interpreted to mean that certain desirable elements of national tradition could be preserved, adapted to modern conditions, and even encouraged as exemplars of “internationalist” Soviet modernity. The consumption of national-style goods, in this view, could serve either as a local manifestation of consumerist plenty or as an imagined repository of the people’s unique capabilities, practices, and values. Arguments along these lines most often reaffirmed rather than undermined the principles of all-Soviet consumption discourses – culturedness, hygiene, and tasteful restraint – even while posing their fundamental compatibility with uniquely Central Asian ways of life.

As perplexing as this dualism in consumer advice could be, however, it is necessary to remember that both perspectives were most often the work of ethnically Central Asian members of the Soviet intelligentsia. Without more information on their personal histories and individual trajectories over the course of the post-war period, it is difficult to guess at the motives behind these intellectuals’ advocacy of one position over the other. Nonetheless, it can be said that, even when their rhetoric was at its most Europeanizing and Eurocentric, it spoke to and within the context of local Central Asian life in a way that distinguished it from all-Soviet discourses of consumption. At a minimum, local-language critiques of Central Asian “backwardness,” unculturedness, poor hygiene, and rural traditionalism operated on the presumption that the writers themselves embodied an alternative, more modern, more socialist variant of Central Asianness, both asserting and to some extent playing out a deep social and cultural divide within the local population. Just as often, though, the act of translating Soviet consumption discourses to the Central Asian context substantially shifted their meanings. On the one hand, they picked up not only the sensory and affective flavor of local life but also strongly held local values surrounding matters of dress and home décor, including a special concern for children, for guests, and for the regulation of female modesty. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the faint incongruity between all-Soviet discourses and the messaging of the local-language press that resulted from this cross-pollination was only compounded in the satirical arm of the press, with its methods of insinuation rather

than straightforward didacticism and its focus on critiquing dissolute modern youth rather than decrying excessive traditionalism. On the other hand, elements of Soviet discourse that might otherwise have remained purely the purview of bureaucrats and the official press – self-identifications as “cultured” and “European,” a suspicion of “philistine” displays of wealth, an association between backwardness, poor hygiene, and poverty – instead entered into the Central Asian lexicon. The ways that such Soviet-originated categories were taken up and mutated further in the everyday life of the local social sphere will be one of the topics of Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

Immodest *Stiliagi* and Labor-Shirking *Kelins*: Entangled Soviet and Central Asian Discourses on Gender, Youth, and Consumption, 1955-1985

In January of 1959, the Kyrgyz-language Soviet journal *Chalkan* published a satirical text presented as a letter from an elderly reader living in the remote and mountainous Tian Shan region of Kyrgyzstan. In this text, as was typical of many satires in the Central Asian Soviet press during this period, the perspective of an exaggeratedly naïve and old-fashioned village woman was adopted in order to comment on tensions between modern life and traditionalism, between youth and the older generation. In the decades following the Second World War, youth culture and its Western-oriented, consumerist tendencies had grown into a subject of concern throughout the Soviet Union, both within the arena of official rhetoric, which became to a large extent fixated on and anchored by the wartime experience, and simultaneously among certain members of the older generation whose sense of self and community had been forged in an atmosphere of hardship and sacrifice. From this perspective, the newfound comforts and luxuries enjoyed but not adequately earned or appreciated by the younger generation carried with them the danger of moral degeneration, and young people's preoccupation with selfish consumerism threatened to overwhelm the Soviet virtues of labor and civic responsibility.

In the case of this particular satire, titled "Where is my daughter going?" (*Kyzym kaida barat?*), the perspective is that of an aging Kyrgyz woman who seems unfamiliar with both the Russian language and the modern Soviet life in the big cities. Her folksy unworldliness is signaled by her use of the rural Kyrgyz pronunciation "Boronzoz" to refer to the republic's capital city of Frunze. The ignorance of this character is, to be sure, overstated for comic effect. When her daughter describes her new husband as "*sympatichnyi*," Russian slang for "attractive," the old woman remarks, "Since *Sympatichnyi* isn't a

Kyrgyz name, I thought her husband must be of a different nation [Kyrg. *ulut*].”¹ The writer evidently assumed that the journal’s readers would be more sophisticated and knowledgeable than this caricatured village woman and, at the very least, understand the Russian phrases to which she reacts with bewilderment. Nevertheless, the chief purpose of this text is neither to ridicule her backwardness and ignorance nor to present it as a foil for the progressive cultural changes that had occurred under Soviet rule. Instead, the voice of this elderly traditionalist is invoked in service of a Soviet critique of the shallowness, inauthenticity, and consumerist excesses of contemporary youth. On its own, this fact would not be remarkable in the context of the post-war generational anxieties described above. But in a rather extraordinary turn for a text published in an official journal during the Khrushchev era, this Soviet critique of dissolute youth consumerism bleeds over into specifically Central Asian ambivalences about the effects of urban influence and Russification more generally.

“Before my daughter left for the city,” the story begins, “all of the old women used to say that she was an exemplary girl [*mykty kyz*].” But after finishing primary school, this young woman, named Baaly, had moved to Frunze to attend university. By the time she returned to her home village (*aiyl*) on holiday just one year later, she had undergone a striking transformation:

How could I not recognize my own daughter! Her black hair, which used to reach down to her waist, was gone, sheared bare, and in its place remained one bunch done up like a horse’s tail, which seemed to have been dyed completely blonde [*sap-sary kylyp boiotup algan eken*]. When I said, “Eh, my daughter, why isn’t your hair black?” and she answered, “*Mamochka* [Rus.], they say black hair doesn’t suit my complexion,” what was I to do? But it wasn’t this that upset me. My daughter’s earlier aspirations had completely changed. She turned up her nose with displeasure at her own home, which had grown larger in the meantime. She used the words “*temno*” [Rus., dark] and “*syryst*” [Rus. *syrost’*, dampness or dankness] about our house. What does this mean?

The sketched illustrations accompanying this story indicate some of the implied content of Baaly’s dramatic transformation: prior to leaving home she is shown with a pair of long braids and dressed in “traditional” Kyrgyz style, with a dark vest over an ankle-length white dress. After her year in Frunze,

¹ Zhaparkul Alybaev, “Kyzym kaida barat?,” *Chalkan* no. 1 (Jan. 1959): 6.

though, she sports a ponytail, a European-style knee-length skirt, and a handbag (Figure 4.1). As with her shorn and dyed hair, these changes in external appearance are linked in the text to tactlessness, a disconnection from the virtues fostered by family and community, and an inability to properly enter into the social world of the village of her birth. In her impractical attire, for instance, Baaly struggles to keep up with her mother during a walk through the countryside to the home of a childhood friend, and as a guest there, displays a shocking lack of proper etiquette, haughtily calling the napkin offered to her “*graznyi* [Rus. *griaznyi*, dirty].”

The deference to fashion, the preoccupation with appearances, the language peppered with slang and informalities, the brazen and antisocial behavior – all of these were frequently presented in Soviet satire as the symptoms of a youth culture that had become increasingly corrupted by consumerism, materialistic frivolity, and the allure of Western styles and ways of life. Throughout the Soviet Union in the post-war period, the figure of the *stiliaga*, the youthful “style-seeker” or “hipster,” was targeted for condemnation and ridicule in the official press. Such individuals were branded as shallow, spoiled, and self-absorbed, consummate consumers who slavishly followed Western trends and cultivated a showy personal style that was incomprehensible or even offensive to the older generation. As Alexei Yurchak has described in the Russian context, the Soviet press during this period relentlessly attacked *stiliagi* as “deviationists, bourgeois sympathizers, and uneducated loafers.”² *Stiliagi* were characterized as laughable in their unconventional styles but also as morally debased, prioritizing individual acquisitiveness over social responsibility – the embodiment of the dangers of excessive and incorrect consumption that were warned against in normative Soviet discussions of appropriate consumer behavior.³

² Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171-172.

³ The issue of “excessive” consumption and Soviet attitudes toward consumerism are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

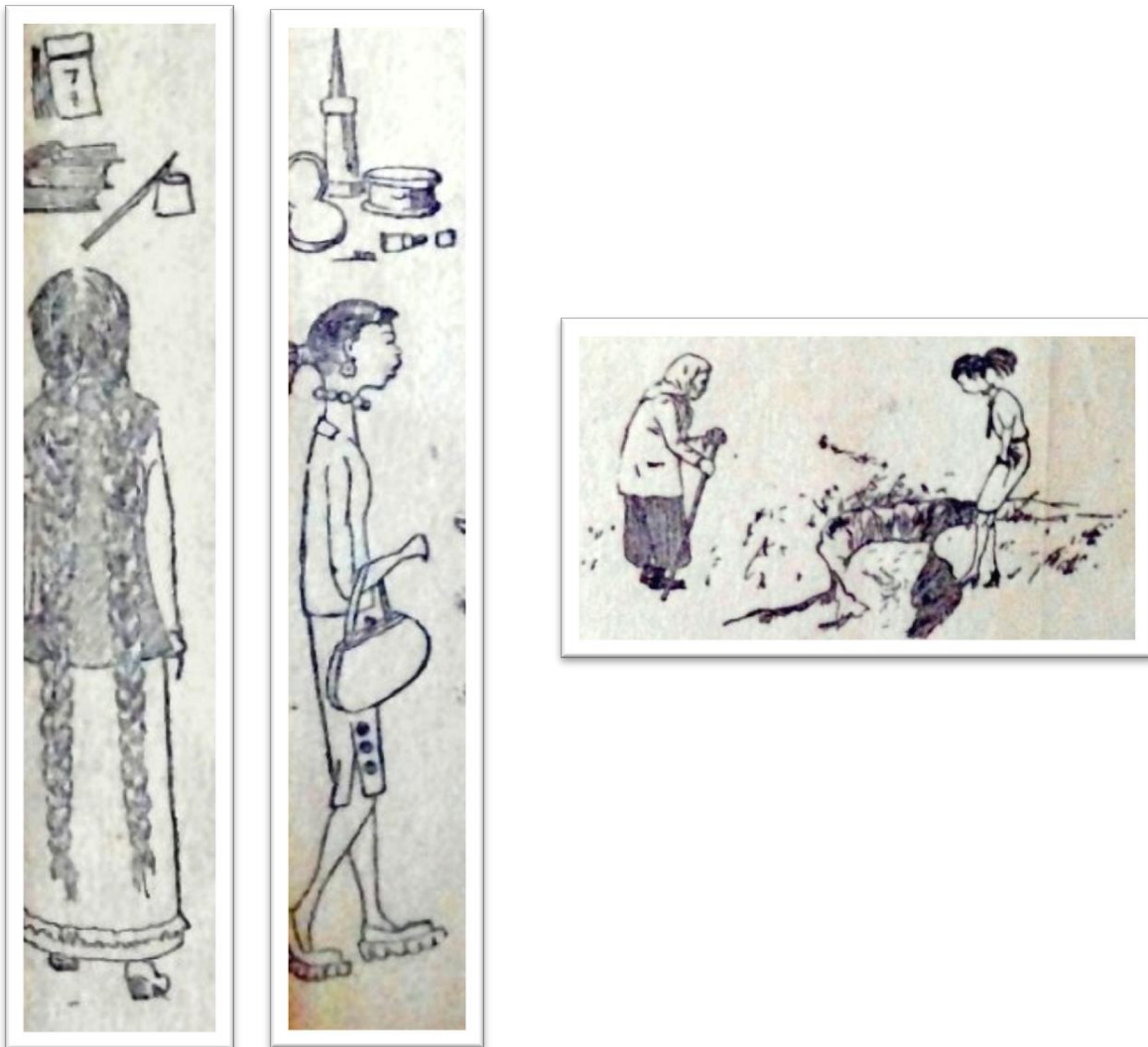


Figure 4.1. Illustrations accompanying the satire “Where is my daughter going?” The images show a young Kyrgyz woman before and after a year attending university in the republic capital of Frunze (modern-day Bishkek). Source: Zhaparkul Alybaev, “Kyzym kaida barat?,” *Chalkan* no. 1 (Jan. 1959): 6.

Where the Kyrgyz satire of Baaly and her mother begins to diverge from the Soviet Union-wide discourse about the pernicious influence of consumerism on youth culture, however, is in the way that Baaly’s degeneration is not attributed to contact with “the West” so much as with the Russian or Russified milieu of the Kyrgyz capital city. Her new, distinctive slang is specifically Russian slang, and the

community from which she excludes herself is not only an industrious Soviet community but also a culturally Kyrgyz one. Her dyed blonde hair demonstrates her consumerist artificiality and shallowness, but also signifies a kind of de-ethnicization. When her mother comes to visit her briefly in Frunze, she notes that Baaly's manner of dress differs from that of many other young women at the institute who "wore Kyrgyz-style [*kyrgyzcha*] dresses with a flounced hem," and whose appearance she characterizes as "warm" or "pleasant" (*zhyluu*). When she arrives home in the village, Baaly not only refuses to eat the Kyrgyz food her mother has prepared for her, but requests a Russian dish, beef stroganoff, in its place. Eventually, she elects to marry a prototypical *stiliaga* youth, "with hair falling down the back of his neck, wearing wide pants, and bare-headed," whom she introduces to her mother in an amalgam of Kyrgyz and Russian: "*Mama, taanyshyb koj, moi muzh.*" At their wedding, they perform "the American dance 'boogie-boogie,'" one of the diagnostic markers in Soviet satire of the wildness and degeneracy of Western-influenced *stiliagi* culture, but also practice the Russian tradition in which the newlyweds kiss to shouts of "*gor'ko.*" The equal bewilderment and alienation with which the elderly narrator describes the hallmarks of *stiliagi* culture on the one hand and the trappings of an increasingly Russian-influenced urban lifestyle on the other is left implicit, but is unmistakable nevertheless.

Within the context of an official Soviet rhetoric that, while careful to avoid explicitly urging the adoption of Russian habits by Central Asians, tended to hail cross-cultural influences like these as salutary evidence of "internationalism" and the "friendship of peoples," the way in which this text links Russification to *stiliagi* culture and moral degeneration is, to put it mildly, off-message.⁴ But what is even more remarkable is that Baaly is most objectionable when she speaks not only in Russian but also in "Soviet," employing the rhetoric of darkness and poor hygiene that was ubiquitous in Soviet critiques

⁴ For an analysis of Soviet rhetoric praising cross-cultural influences in private and domestic life, see Adrienne Lynn Edgar, "Marriage, Modernity, and the 'Friendship of Nations': Interethnic Intimacy in Post-War Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Central Asian Survey* 26/4 (December 2007): 581-599.

of rural Central Asian life.⁵ As we saw in Chapter 3, in numerous didactic texts published in Central Asian-language journals of the 1950s and 1960s, an urban outsider would reflect on the home interiors of villagers with dismay and distaste, citing precisely the features of darkness and dirtiness that Baaly invokes in her Russian-language interjections. But whereas those texts posit the urban realm as the vanguard of a superior, more modern way of life, here that hierarchical relationship is destabilized, if not turned entirely on its head. It is possible to read more than a little irony into the elderly mother's response to Baaly's request for beef stroganoff: "Forgive an ignorant [lit. dark] person [*karanggy kishini kechirib koi*], but I've never heard of such a dish." To be sure, the story makes both Baaly and her mother into comic stereotypes, but the implication seems to be that there is a kind of noble simplicity and honesty in the mother's "ignorance," and that it is a far more forgivable fault than Baaly's abrasive disdain, if it is a fault at all. Even as the Khrushchev-era state, and even other Kyrgyz-language journals, were utilizing exactly these discourses of health and hygiene, ignorance and enlightenment to urge the modernization of rural life in Central Asia and elsewhere, they are being invoked here with a satirical twist, denoting instead the shallowness and snobbishness of the urbanized observer that have taken the place of the feelings of warmth and gratitude that are owed to one's elders, family, and ethnic community.

The satire of Baaly and her mother, while representing an unusually trenchant example of this genre, is far from unique within the Soviet Central Asian press of the time. It was part of an anxious, contested, but pervasive conversation in the region that ran through the local-language satirical press from the late 1950s through the early 1980s. This conversation took the question of consumer culture and consumption practices as one of its primary points of concern. Differentiated consumer habits were deployed in satirical texts and images to represent, scrutinize, and critique changes in material culture,

⁵ Stephen Kotkin uses the phrase "speaking Bolshevik" to describe the ways that Russian workers in the 1930s incorporated official categories and terminologies into their speech and languages of identification. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

differences in urban and rural life, the transformation of gender roles, and the destabilized relationship between the older and younger generations in post-war Central Asian society. Like the didactic professional advice texts discussed in the previous chapter, Soviet Central Asian satire came to be thoroughly immersed in a matrix of local language, local associations, and local concerns, and in the process considerably widened the possibilities of public print discourse in Central Asia during the Soviet period. In particular, the antipathy toward consumer culture and the appeal to the values of an older generation in post-war official rhetoric seems to have lent legitimacy to Central Asian push-back against cultural “modernization” and Europeanization, which may have otherwise seemed contrary to Soviet ideals. It is conceivable that satirical critiques of *stiliagi* and dissolute youth culture may have been deliberately utilized by Central Asian writers and cartoonists as an officially acceptable façade that allowed more subversive messages to be smuggled into print. But often, what seems to have occurred instead is an entanglement of all-union and local values and assumptions. The “Soviet” and “Central Asian” aspects of the discourses of generational gap and consumer culture in many cases became so intermeshed as to appear organically linked or even indistinguishable.

Whatever the motivations of the writers, the content of the Central Asian satirical press during the post-war decades suggests a considerably broader, more flexible, and more locally specific range of permissible discourse under Soviet auspices than one might expect. Apart from its vindication of traditionalist values, perhaps the most salient feature of the Central Asian satirical press is its wide-ranging ambivalence and multivocality, the sheer diversity of views expressed under the rubric of what was ostensibly official Soviet rhetoric. Where official and local concerns firmly overlapped, as in the criticisms of *stiliagi* and out-of-control youth culture, a single viewpoint could be repeated frequently enough that it may be regarded as dominant within this forum. Yet there were other issues for which the discussion was more contested, where a wide variety of implications and shadings of meaning were possible – attitudes toward women’s new roles and personal styles, for example. It is significant,

moreover, that even contradictory positions on these issues tended to be expressed in a shared language, appealing to a common assemblage of images, associations, and values that were as often local as official in origin. In this sense, the significance of these texts lies less in their potential for the expression of specifically subversive points of view than in the manifestation of a shared set of tropes, symbols, and images, constituted out of the interaction of Soviet and Central Asian rhetorics, which could serve as a common field for discussion and dispute in post-war Central Asian society. In short, they demonstrate the possibility for the emergence of an officially influenced but localized and locally resonant Soviet Central Asian culture, and one that acted not as a set of rigid, externally imposed cultural forms, but rather as a living medium for social contestation and debate.

Local-language satire in Soviet Central Asia

Like their better-known Russian-language counterpart *Krokodil*, the Soviet satirical journals of the Central Asian republics (including *Chalkan* in the Kyrgyz SSR and *Mushtum* in the Uzbek SSR) were nominally organs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and as such might be understood as representative of or at least in line with an “official” point of view. This understanding is not entirely incorrect, but does require a few points of qualification. First, as in the case of *Krokodil*, these journals’ satirical function meant that they were permitted to speak more critically and frankly than was typical in other registers of official Soviet discourse. In the majority of cases, the targets of satire were entirely “safe” and state-approved ones, made up of groups of people or phenomena that were already recognized as un-Soviet and subject to attack in official rhetoric: drunkards, fashion-obsessed youths, religious charlatans, obstructionist bureaucrats who had lost their connection to the working people, and so on. But even so, the constant foregrounding of the moral failings of Soviet citizens meant that satirical journals tended to undercut the optimistic, triumphalist tone favored in post-war Soviet rhetoric more generally. They served as one of the primary arenas in which uncomfortable social problems and

the embarrassing incongruities of daily life could be acknowledged and discussed in print. Moreover, as heavy-handed as Soviet satire could at times be, it utilized a set of genres and devices – poetry, fictional narratives, jokes, and satirical cartoons – that hinged on ambiguity and implication, in contrast to the straightforward didacticism and exhortation found elsewhere in the official press. This made it a unique medium for the exploration of tensions and ambivalences in state policy or official rhetoric. Finally, in the case of Central Asia, by the post-war period local-language journals only rarely translated and reprinted materials from *Krokodil* or the Moscow center. Instead, the overwhelming bulk of their content was generated within Central Asia, in Central Asian languages, for a Central Asian audience.⁶ If this content may in some ways be regarded as “official” in provenance, it was also strikingly focused on local life and local concerns.

As a result, even as Central Asian satirical journals drew on a shared Soviet discourse and set of officially endorsed goals, adapting their content to Moscow’s policy priorities of the moment, they were at the same time steeped in a distinctly local universe of symbols and associations, turns of phrase and proverbs, stock characters and locally recognizable settings. In some cases, this seems to have been an intentional strategy within the Soviet Central Asian press, intended to add local relevance and appeal to what were essentially official messages. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the traditional folk hero Nasreddin Afandi, who in the pre-revolutionary period had used his wits to get the better of kings and wise men, now appeared on the pages of the journal *Mushtum* to mock labor shirkers, *stiliagi*, and greedy Soviet shop attendants who cheated customers.⁷ But while the localization of Soviet discourse was something that could be actively encouraged by the party and state authorities, it would be a mistake to conclude that it constituted nothing more than tokenism, an inorganic juxtaposition of local “forms” and official

⁶ The Uzbek-language *Mushtum* began publishing some of its articles in Russian in 1959, but this lasted less than a year; afterward, satirical cartoons tended to be published with captions in both Uzbek and Russian, but otherwise all journal content was in Uzbek. For the Kyrgyz-language journal *Chalkan*, bilingual printing began in March 1963, but similarly had ended by 1967.

⁷ See, for example, “Afandi latifalari,” *Mushtum* no. 11 (Jun. 1965): 9.

“content.” As will be seen, local values and preoccupations were not kept from seeping in to the discussion, at times even in ways that worked contrary to the spirit of state rhetoric. In conjunction with the already ambivalent Soviet attitude toward consumption and youth culture, this opened up surprisingly expansive opportunities for the exploration, within a Soviet Central Asian public forum, of topics that might be regarded as too sensitive to address within official discourse – the blurred lines between modernity and inauthenticity, cultural change and cultural loss, defiance of tradition and amorality.

One final necessary caveat about Central Asian satirical journals as a historical source is that these journals were far from universally read by Central Asians, and it would be difficult to establish that they exerted a strong influence on the thinking of their readers. Even with much better knowledge of how these texts were read, and by whom, than is currently available, the question of their impact on belief and behavior would remain murky. Nevertheless, I would argue that two significant types of inferences can be drawn from these sources. First, purely from the standpoint of the production and publication of these texts, they can be used to establish the horizons of possibility for Soviet Central Asian public discourse – what could be said in print under the auspices of the “official” press. The expansion and at some points awkward distension of what could be incorporated under the umbrella of “Sovietness” is one of the recurring themes of Soviet rule in Central Asia in the post-war period, and the satirical press vividly illustrates the elasticity of these boundaries. How this particular corner of public discourse resolved or agonized over tensions between local values and Soviet ideals is, I would argue, already interesting and revealing, regardless of its broader applicability. Second, I have adopted the working hypothesis that these texts, for all the idiosyncrasies of their production and their medium, can be interpreted as reflecting topics of broader local concern and interest, especially where they diverge from what is regarded as normal Soviet rhetoric for this era. The continuous presence of a relatively small number of editors and cartoonists over the course of this period, with many of them staffing the

journals for a decade or more, means that their individual eccentricities may have been amplified in a way that skews the cultural representativeness of these texts. (There are a handful of cartoonists, to give one example, who seem to have gravitated toward subject matter that afforded them the opportunity to draw pictures of curvaceous and scantily clad women, possibly for reasons other than a sense of journalistic obligation.) Nevertheless, without arguing that the preoccupations of these journals directly correspond with those of Central Asian society at large, we can conclude from their deployment of locally specific rhetoric and imagery that they were to some extent in dialogue with and responsive to broader social and cultural discourses in the region. They thus highlight some of the intensely local, culturally specific ways that Soviet rhetoric was digested and refracted, demonstrating the possibilities for the entanglement, and at certain points mutual reinforcement, of Soviet and Central Asian discourses.

The post-war generation gap and the rehabilitation of the Central Asian family

In order to understand the extent to which the satire of Baaly and others like it represented a disruption of the Soviet norm, it is necessary to appreciate both changes in Soviet rhetoric by the post-war period and the specificities of state policy and ideology in Central Asia. Already during the so-called “Great Retreat” from cultural revolution during the latter part of the Stalin era, Soviet rhetoric had begun to accommodate more socially conservative and traditionalist attitudes than it had during the 1920s and early 1930s. If previously the “new” had invariably been favorably contrasted to the “old,” the youth to their elders, a radical revision of gender norms to traditional family structures, after the middle of the 1930s, state policy swung toward a reassertion of authority, social order, pre-revolutionary aesthetic values, and familial hierarchy.⁸ Two issues that were particularly affected were

⁸ Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc: New York, 1946).

generation and gender. The younger generation lost its position in Soviet thought as the vanguard of revolutionary transformation and became instead the target of supervision and discipline in schools and universities, while policies toward marriage and divorce underwent a pro-natalist retrenchment.⁹ Within Central Asia, though, the state's continued high-priority struggle against traditional practices like veiling and forced marriage for women meant that this reversal had less impact on official rhetoric and practice than it may have in other parts of the Soviet Union. One of the most frequently cited aspects of the "Great Retreat" in Soviet family policy, for instance, was the tightening of divorce laws and a new rhetoric stigmatizing frivolous divorce, intended to reinforce the stability of the family unit. A 1951 report from the Supreme Court of the Uzbek SSR, however, maintained a careful distinction between divorces in Uzbekistan initiated by the husband, which were regarded as irresponsible and socially disruptive, and divorces initiated by the wife, which were held up as a necessary means of escape from the abusive and coercive situations created by Central Asian family practices.¹⁰ Central Asian values, and above all traditional family hierarchies and gender norms, continued to be branded, as they were in the state campaign against veiling in the 1920s, as potentially dangerous, reactionary forces, with young women portrayed in the press and literary accounts as victims at the hands of their parents, husbands, and mothers-in-law.

As early as the post-Stalin 1950s and 1960s, however, the local-language press was beginning to hint at a more sympathetic attitude toward the traditional order of the Central Asian family, affirming surprisingly conservative notions about familial roles and the authority of the older generation over the younger. Exactly when and why this shift occurred is unclear. In part, it may have been a local manifestation of a more general turn throughout the Soviet Union in the post-war period toward the sacralization of the wartime generation and its experiences. To the extent that World War II came to be

⁹ Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*, 214; Mie Nakachi, "Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union, 1944-1955," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2008).

¹⁰ GARF, F. R-9492, Op. 1a, d. 639, 1-12.

memorialized as the climactic moment of Soviet achievement and communal belonging, in Central Asia as elsewhere in the USSR, it is in some ways unsurprising that the older generation could now be defined as the definitively “Soviet” generation, and the ostensibly untested, lackadaisical post-war youth regarded with suspicion and anxiety. By the Brezhnev era, Soviet culture and public discourse had grown increasingly backward-looking, anchored by constant references to the Second World War, and this placed the generation born after the war in a strained position and legitimated the older generation's suspicion of unfamiliar youth lifestyles and a rapidly changing, Western-influenced culture.

The specific volte-face on Central Asian family and gender norms may also have been connected to the outcomes of the wartime experience, although in a more oblique way. Paul Stronski has argued that anti-Nazi propaganda produced for a Central Asian audience during World War II eventually came to leverage local cultural resonances in an effort to “particularize the war for Central Asians.” While wartime propaganda in Russia appealed to Russian culture and nationalism, in Central Asia it graphically described the potential consequences of the Nazi conquest of Central Asian peoples, with imagery of the enslavement of children, the slaughter of elderly parents and grandparents, and the rape of Central Asian women.¹¹ In this way, Stronski argues, propagandists “tried to tie traditional notions of gender and the Uzbek family, which they had attempted to undermine only a few short years before, to the Soviet Union as a whole.”¹² The experience of the war may have meant that the Soviet state was able to lay claim to a position not as a threat to the Central Asian family unit, as it had been perceived during the 1920s and 1930s unveiling campaign, but rather as its defender. While the effectiveness of this propaganda tactic is uncertain, it represented a relatively novel effort within state rhetoric to appeal to Central Asian values and frame them as compatible with or even reinforced by the Soviet system, and this notion finds powerful echoes in the Soviet Central Asian press of the subsequent decades.

¹¹ An example of this genre is found in “Pis'mo boitsam-uzbekam ot uzbekskogo naroda,” *Pravda*, 31 Oct. 1942.

¹² Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 79, 84.

Finally, it is possible that the slackening of Soviet criticism of Central Asian family structures derived from a sense that, by the late 1950s, Soviet policy had already achieved its chief goals in relation to gender and family in the region – above all, the elimination of the veil from public life and the integration of Central Asian women into education and labor outside of the home.¹³ As both Marianne Kamp and Anna Temkina have observed, the Soviet policy of “women’s liberation” in Central Asia focused on expanding women’s participation in public life, and was quite successful on these terms. But policy-makers were considerably less interested in (or, naturally, capable of) intervening in private life and the practices of gender and sexual regulation within the family.¹⁴ The equality of women in the public sphere, the right to work and be educated, and the prohibition of practices like veiling, bride price, and coerced marriage continued to be affirmed through the entire post-war Soviet period and constituted non-negotiable elements of the public discourse in Central Asia, even in the sometimes unorthodox local-language press. But on a whole array of other issues less explicitly targeted by Soviet policy – hierarchical relationships and obligations within the family, differentiated roles in married life, standards of modesty and deferential behavior for young people and especially young women – the public discussion of the late 1950s and 1960s grew increasingly ambivalent and two-sided, in some areas, as we shall see, even skewing closer to something resembling Central Asian traditionalism than to the rhetoric of Soviet officialdom.

An especially revealing gauge of the post-war rapprochement between Soviet and Central Asian rhetoric concerning both generation and gender can be found in the evolving uses to which the image of the Central Asian mother-in-law (Uzbek *qaynona*, Kyrgyz *kaiyn ene*) was put between the 1920s and

¹³ By 1950, at least, the veil was rare enough in Tashkent’s “New City” to draw comment. See Zulfiya, “Vstrecha s zhenshchinois v parandzhe,” *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 19 April 1950. See also Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 194.

¹⁴ Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 215-216; Anna Temkina, “Gendernaia Modernizatsiia Po-Sovetski vs. Traditsionnye Stsenarii Seksual'noi zhizni [Soviet-Style Gender Modernization vs. Traditional Scenarios of Sexual Life],” *Ab Imperio*, vol. 3 (2008): 281.

1970s. Early Soviet Central Asian texts typically portrayed the mother-in-law as one of the chief forces in the oppression of the newly married young woman (Uzb. and Kyrg. *kelin*), requiring her to behave deferentially, constraining her from pursuing education and work outside of the home, and treating her like a servant within the family. Mothers-in-law were also represented as frequent accomplices in criminalized practices like the forced or underage marriages of young women. By the post-war period, however, an increasingly sympathetic image of the Central Asian mother-in-law had begun to appear in public discourse. A 1953 short story by Uzbek author Rahmat Faizi, for instance, contrasts one character who fits the old image of the excessively critical mother-in-law, harping on her daughter-in-law's every shortcoming, with a more fair-minded mother-in-law who not only loves and respects her *kelin*, but also facilitates her education and efforts to become a mechanic by sharing in the housework and looking after the children during the day.¹⁵ The suggestion that traditional Central Asian family structures and relationships, including the practice of moving into the husband's home and living with his parents, might be compatible with and even reinforce the high-priority Soviet goal of women's education and labor (in the traditionally male-gendered occupation of mechanic, no less) is quite startling in light of the polarized rhetoric of traditionalism and modernity that had proliferated in the region in the 1920s and 1930s.

As anxieties over youth consumption habits grew more acute over the course of the post-war decades, Soviet Central Asian rhetoric shifted even further toward vindication of the mother-in-law and, increasingly, problematization of the figure of the *kelin*. The daughter-in-law was no longer predominantly presented as a progressive young woman striving to be freed from traditional constraints in order to become educated and engage in socially useful labor. This image did not disappear, but alongside it arose a competing image of the *kelin* as an irresponsible young consumer, self-absorbed and

¹⁵ Rakhmat Faizi, "Svekrov'," *Uzbekskie rasskazy*, ed. N. Vladimirova (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury im. Gafura Guliyama, 1967).

frivolous, who pushed back against tradition not in order to become a fully formed Soviet person but in order to shirk responsibility for housework and pursue bourgeois fashions and luxuries. A striking example of this can be found in a 1956 Kyrgyz satirical cartoon, which contrasts a “demure” or “obedient” (*elpek*) *kelin* before marriage, modestly attired and industriously doing housework while her future husband and mother-in-law look on approvingly, and the same young woman after marriage, who dresses in modern fashions and idly gazes at herself in a mirror while her elderly mother-in-law is forced to complete household chores in her place (Figure 4.2).¹⁶ The social pressures of Central Asian family life, requiring that a young woman prove her worth and demonstrate her willingness to serve her future family before marriage, are thus presented as a salutary force, restraining women from consumerist self-indulgence, rather than as an impediment to social progress. In a similar vein, a text in *Mushtum* from 1968 notes that while it is true that some mothers-in-law continuously find fault with “good,” “modest,” and “simple [*sodda*]” *kelins*, it may in some cases be the selfish and consumerist attitudes of the modern *kelin* that cause domestic ruptures: “Some young brides [*kelinchaklar*] look down on elderly people as having fallen behind the times [*turmushdan orqada qolgan*]. Chasing after new fashions, they are not equipped for the conditions in the family. ‘Surely the older people will run the household,’ they think. As a result, coldness and disharmony come into the family.”¹⁷ Just as in the satire “Where is my daughter going?”, the progressive rhetoric of the Communist party and the notion of the older generation as “backward” (*orqada qolgan*) are flagged as potentially dangerous in the hands of self-serving and presumptuous young people, and are reined in by the Central Asian social requirement to behave respectfully and deferentially toward one’s elders.

An even more dramatic upending of official rhetoric appears in an Uzbek satirical cartoon published in 1969, but in this case, it is the Soviet rhetoric of gender equality that is cast into doubt by

¹⁶ Image by E. Plotnikov, *Chalkan* no. 10 (Oct. 1956): 3.

¹⁷ Muzayyana Alaviya, “Uyida rohati yo’qning, ko’chada farog’ati yo’q,” *Mushtum* no. 24 (Dec. 1968): 8.



Figure 4.2. From obedient *kelin* to self-absorbed consumer. Caption: “Before becoming a *kelin*, she is obedient before her mother-in-law. After becoming a *kelin*, she is like a club against her mother-in-law’s head.” Source: Image by E. Plotnikov, *Chalkan* no. 10 (Oct. 1956): 3.

association with a dissolute member of the younger generation. A young woman – her bourgeois, un-Soviet character symbolized, as before, by the activity of applying cosmetics while looking in a mirror – refuses her mother-in-law's request to finish chopping carrots by saying, “Let my husband finish cutting them. We have equal rights [*huquqimiz teng*]” (Figure 4.3).¹⁸ It cannot be said that the cartoon overtly rejects the idea of women’s “equal rights,” but it does propose that the young woman is mistaken in her belief that equality of rights entails a literally equal division of labor in household tasks – half of the carrots to be cut by the wife, and half by the husband. At the very least, the text implies that to refer to gender equality in an attempt to reduce one’s load of housework is a misuse of the concept, contrary to the Soviet values of diligence and hard work; perhaps more importantly, it invalidates this rhetoric when coming from the mouth of a certain kind of young woman, blocking attempts to appeal to “equality” in

¹⁸ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1969): 13.



Figure 4.3. “Equal rights” or labor-shirking? Caption: – “Cut the rest of the carrots, daughter-in-law.” – “Let my husband cut these ones, we have equal rights.” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1969): 13.

an effort to challenge the *kelin's* place within the family. The perceived idleness and irresponsibility of contemporary Central Asian youth, closely tied in press representations and rhetoric to their consumerist tendencies, made it possible within a Central Asian public forum to critique, constrict, and hold at bay points of Soviet ideology that might disrupt traditional family hierarchies.

Increasingly from the 1950s on, then, locally specific ideas about familial hierarchies and gender roles – especially the expectation of the *kelin's* heavy participation in housework – were reformulated as extensions of Soviet values: industriousness, love of labor, even, in a twisted way, egalitarianism. A particularly mind-bending piece of advice literature on Central Asian family life, written in 1960 by the prominent Uzbek writer G’afur G’ulom and published in the women’s journal *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari*,

chided young Central Asian women for “forgetting about equality in rights” by demanding that their husbands share in the housework: “If a *kelin* has finished a higher education and her husband’s education is more lowly, in this situation many of our young brides become boastful [*kekayibroq ketadilar*]. Forgetting about equality in rights, they belittle their husbands. They say, ‘You may work, but I work too. Wash your own laundry, take care of your child yourself.’”¹⁹ While the above-mentioned cartoon had merely sought to preempt the disruptive potential of the idea of “equal rights,” this text goes further, attempting to leverage “gender equality” to reinforce conventional family dynamics – the necessity for wives to show adequate respect to their husbands, raise children, and participate in housework. It would be easy to conclude that this apparent distortion of official Soviet rhetoric was deliberate, a calculated strategy to slip Central Asian traditionalism and patriarchal family relations into print by concealing them inside the Trojan horse of the Communist Party’s favorite catch phrases and targets of critique, and this possibility should not be ignored. But the sheer ubiquity and consistency of the notion that *kelins* were being un-Soviet by shirking household labor and disrespecting their mothers-in-law and husbands, alongside and in spite of the continued celebration of women’s education and public labor, suggests that something more profound and unpremeditated was taking place. This is the process I am describing as rhetorical entanglement, in which images, tropes, and other signifiers accumulated new attachments and associations as they moved between all-union and Central Asian contexts without ever fully surrendering their original content.

Consumer culture and the problem of the contemporary youth

Concerns about dissolute, socially irresponsible youth in the post-war Soviet press tended to fixate on the figure of the outrageously dressed, Western-looking *stiliaga*, and the Central Asian-language press was no different. Even when not identified by name as *stiliagi*, the invariable indicator of

¹⁹ G’afur, G’ulom, “Ba’zi oilaviy gaplar...”, *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 8 (Aug. 1960): 30.

problematic youths was a specific set of consumption habits: unconventional dress and hairstyles, a preoccupation with foreign fashions and imported goods, and accessorization with the trappings of their debauched forms of sociability – alcohol, cigarettes, cosmetics, fashion magazines, and radios or tape players playing rock music. On the one hand, these elements became the shorthand way of visually establishing the stock character of the “*stiliaga*” or “consumerist youth” in Soviet satires, somewhat analogous to how a top hat and monocle might be used to quickly establish the stock character of “capitalist.” But rather than merely serving as caricatured identifying features, these objects and practices embodied the crux of the problem with contemporary youth from the perspective of the Soviet press. These young people’s consumption habits were, according to this view, in themselves irresponsible, disruptive, and offensive; moreover, they were causally connected to a whole array of other moral faults. Central Asian texts frequently used the Russian neologism *stiliagi*, “style-seekers,” to label consumerist youths, but they also employed a variety of more morally expressive local terms like the Uzbek *erkatoylar*, “spoiled children,” and *taqasaltanglar*, “idlers.”²⁰ A common trope in the Central Asian press during this period represented *stiliagi* youth as labor shirkers and parasites on the older generation, siphoning off their parents’ and in some cases grandparents’ incomes, especially pensions, to feed their consumption habits.²¹ A consumerist interest in particular fashions, goods, and music was thus not just a symbol but an integral component of the shortcomings of this subset of contemporary youth – their self-centeredness, irresponsibility, laziness, and disrespect for elders and community norms.

As noted in the previous chapter, Soviet rhetoric during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras did not comprehensively pathologize consumer culture, but instead hailed increasing interest in consumer novelties, within limits, as a benchmark of both the population's prosperity and its rising level of

²⁰ See, for instance, A. Zamonali, “Erkatoylar,” *Mushtum* no. 4 (Feb. 1971): 5.

²¹ For example, Image by S. Ishenov, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1969): 6; image by B. Zhumabaev, *Chalkan* no. 8 (Aug. 1977): 9; Image by S. Ishenov, *Chalkan* no. 11 (Nov. 1977): 7.

sophistication and aesthetic discernment under socialism. Within this post-war rhetoric of material abundance and the shift in emphasis from purely physical needs to social and cultural ones, even previously disparaged elements of consumer culture such as the pursuit of constantly changing fashions could be framed, as Susan E. Reid puts it, “not only as legitimate, but even as an entitlement.”²² Nevertheless, there remained a sternly affirmed (if not always clearly delineated) distinction between consumer behavior that was “rational,” conscientious, and tasteful, and the rampant individualism and acquisitiveness that plagued the consumer culture of the bourgeois West. Soviet fashion was characterized by simple beauty, functionality, and suitability to the age, gender, and physical features of the individual person; Western fashion, at least in the extreme form characteristic of Western youth culture, was outrageous, aggressively unconventional, and offensive to social norms and popular tastes.²³ Western youths were held up in the Soviet press as cautionary tales, as “victims of fashion” distinguished equally by their aesthetically offensive clothing choices and the disdain these choices evinced for standards of politeness and public decorum. A 1967 Uzbek article, for example, published photographs taken on the streets of New York City showing young women dressed in bug-eyed sunglasses and tight-fitting fringed leather skirts.²⁴ American youths like these, the article asserted, “chew gum on the streets and in crowded squares, perform shameless dances, and consider respect for elders, self-control, and a sense of restraint to be things that are contrary to freedom [*erkinlikka zid narsa deb tushunadilar*].”

As the language of this condemnation suggests, the social norms and aesthetics that *stiliagi* were accused of flouting through their consumption habits were presented as not only Soviet but also Central Asian ones. A particularly vehement Uzbek-language satirical poem from 1965 drew attention

²² Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 248.

²³ See Chapter 3.

²⁴ “Moda qurbonlari,” *Guliston* no. 4 (Apr. 1967): 31.

to the “short dresses and wide trousers” preferred by *stiliagi* youth, then lambasted them in terms heavily laden with both Soviet and Central Asian moral disapproval: “glittering on the outside, moldy at the heart,” “shameless and indecent,” “without a speck of dignity,” “spoiled and idle.”²⁵ The poem’s first stanza alone describes *stiliagi* using three different Uzbek-language epithets that could roughly be translated as “shameless” – *behayo*, lacking modesty or decency; *besharm*, lacking shame or embarrassment; and *beor*, lacking morals or respect. The poem ends by issuing a warning that appeals to a righteous community that could ambiguously be construed either as all-Soviet or as more specifically ethnic and cultural: “You say, ‘This is a time when the nation [e/] will say nothing, whatever we do,’ / But he who angers the people [xalq] will have a bad end!” As will be discussed in more detail below, the language and imagery accompanying criticisms of female *stiliagi*, which tended to fixate on issues on modesty and bodily exposure, provided an especially overt case of the merging of Central Asian concerns into Soviet rhetoric. A poem in the Uzbek press unsubtly titled “Why are you not ashamed before us? A question to some *stiliaga* girls,” for instance, decried the degenerate female subject’s partially exposed breasts, short mini skirt, and disarrayed hair (Figure 4.4).²⁶ In this case, the Soviet critique of dissolute excess and the traditionalist Central Asian critique of female immodesty overlap to the point that they are nearly indistinguishable from one another.

A corollary of the intense disapproval and anxiety over the disruptive effects of contemporary youth culture in the Soviet Central Asian press was that elderly Uzbeks and Kyrgyz increasingly came to stand in not for the backwardness and stubborn intransigence of traditional ways of life, but rather for a set of values that were posited as simultaneously Soviet and rooted in traditional Central Asia virtues: hard work and love of labor, self-restraint and modesty in personal habits, respectfulness and grace in social relationships. If the divergent values of the older and younger generations were almost invariably

²⁵ Sobir Abdulla, “Stilyaglar,” *Mushtum* no. 24 (Dec. 1965): 7.

²⁶ Fathiddin Nasriddinov, “Nega Bizdan Uyalmaysiz? Ba’zi stilyaga qiz-juvonlarga savol,” *Mushtum* no. 6 (Mar. 1971): 10.



Figure 4.4. “Why are you not ashamed before us? A question to some *stiliaga* girls.” Source: Fathiddin Nasriddinov, “Nega Bizdan Uyalmaisiz?,” *Mushtum* (May 1971): 10.

represented by differences in fashion, hairstyle, and physical comportment, it is significant that the virtuous elders were very often represented not in the Europeanized dress of post-war Soviet respectability, but instead in elements of traditional Central Asian costume.²⁷ A typical Uzbek satirical cartoon from 1968 contrasts garish and colorful *stiliagi*, engaged in angular dance movements and accessorized by alcohol, cigarettes, and a blaring tape recorder, with a white-bearded man, dressed monochromatically, wearing an Uzbek skull cap (*do’ppi*), and standing with a straight-backed, restrained

²⁷ To a large extent, this “traditional” costume was in fact a product of the Soviet period, as discussed in Chapter 1. But the degree of its resemblance to pre-revolutionary dress notwithstanding, it was consistently identified with Central Asian ethnic identity and traditional culture in the post-war period, and tended to be more commonly in use among groups identified as traditionalist, especially the rural population and the older generations. It is unambiguously being used to signify traditionalism and Central Asian ethnic distinctiveness in the post-war press.

pose (Figure 4.5).²⁸ The *stiliagi* here differ little from their counterparts in the contemporary Russian-language press, represented as disorderly and degenerate, but their antithesis is defined in a locally specific form, in terms of the virtues, styles of dress, and behaviors of the Central Asian older generation rather than by a generic figure of Soviet respectability.

The surprisingly seamless interplay of all-union and local concerns in these examinations of generational conflict comes through in a 1973 image in which an elderly, traditionally dressed Kyrgyz man is placed in juxtaposition to two fashionably dressed youths who display not only the degeneracy and tactlessness of which young people were accused in propaganda throughout the Soviet Union (drinking, smoking, and slouching insolently), but also a specific violation of Central Asian cultural values – one of them has carelessly dropped a piece of bread on the ground and is stepping on it.²⁹ The elderly man pleads with the youth that he should not trample the bread, in accordance with the reverence conferred on bread in Kyrgyz culture, but also with a Soviet and post-war abhorrence of wastefulness, especially the waste of food. The young man flippantly replies, “Nobody goes hungry anymore, grandfather [Kyrg. *aksakal*]” (Figure 4.6). This narrative is in many ways highly conventional for the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union: the younger generation, over-satiated with the abundance of the post-war decades and disdainful of any notion of hardship or labor, engages in wasteful consumerism, while the older generation stands as a bulwark of the Soviet values of humility and self-restraint. But in this case, the embodiment of these “Soviet” values is also standing in for a specifically Central Asian set of moral principles, and is identified by an ethnically distinctive mode of dress in contrast to the long hair and European-style suits of the youth.

Shifts in the Soviet Central Asian rhetoric surrounding generational differences, family, and gender norms were thus further amplified and legitimated in the context of the state’s wariness toward

²⁸ Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 22 (Nov. 1968): 12.

²⁹ Image by T. Kasymbekov, *Chalkan* no. 5 (May 1973): 6.



Figure 4.5. Central Asian *stiliagi* youth. Caption: “Oh lord, where have I ended up!” Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 22 (Nov. 1968): 12.



Figure 4.6. The post-war generation gap in Kyrgyzstan. Caption: – “You shouldn’t step on the bread, my child!” – “No one goes hungry anymore, grandfather.” Source: Image by T. Kasymbekov, *Chalkan* no. 5 (May 1973): 6.

the culture of consumerism and luxury that had emerged in the wake of the Second World War out of the increased availability of consumer goods and reopened contacts with the West. Throughout the Soviet Union, the rising tide of consumerism and Western-looking youth culture had kindled a feeling of profound ambivalence, with the figure of the *stiliaga* as the primary locus of concern. But in Central Asia, the cultural resonance of the generational gap and the accompanying ambivalence about post-war modernity was perhaps even more expansive than it was in Russia. Tropes of youth out of control and youth steeped in post-war luxury and selfish acquisitiveness intersected with changes in fashion and consumer behavior that became signifiers not only of shallow novelty, luxury, and waste, but also of modernity more broadly, of inauthenticity, and of a loss of social place and cultural rootedness within a specifically Central Asian community.

Sources of moral degeneration? The West, Russification, and modern urban life

Thus far I have described *stiliagi* and post-war Soviet youth culture in general as “Western-looking.” Criticisms of *stiliagi* in the Soviet press tended to identify one of the primary sources of this youthful affliction as foreign – the influence of the bourgeois West, its egotistic and materialistic values, its products, and its media.³⁰ As will be seen in the next chapter, many young Central Asians in this period did in fact identify with and exhibit an interest in the contemporary trends of the U.S. and Western Europe. But in the context of Central Asia, the most immediate nodes of transmission for these novel ideas, styles, and goods were in fact the Russian-influenced urban centers within the region, especially the republican capital cities, and this fact generated ambiguities and tensions in the Soviet Central Asian discourse on the problem of youth culture. If in Russian Soviet discourse, youth dissoluteness and immorality was associated with the capitalist West, then in Central Asia it might be

³⁰ Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235-236; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171-175.

just as easily linked with Russification, the perils of urban modernity, the weakening of traditional values, and young people's loss of their rootedness in indigenous cultural life. From a Central Asian cultural standpoint, the line between influences that were “Western” and those that were Russian or Soviet, between problems caused by the infiltration of bourgeois consumer culture and problems fostered by life in a cosmopolitan capital city, was anything but clear. The result was that the Central Asian press was able to draw on official Soviet rhetoric to develop a far-reaching and anxious discussion about the costs of modernity and cultural change, including the potential costs of innovations that were fostered by Soviet rule and endorsed by the Soviet state.

It was, to be sure, not uncommon for Central Asian satirical cartoons to draw a straight line connecting the adoption of *stiliagi* consumption habits to the imitation of foreign, specifically American or Western European, models. *Stiliagi* youth in Central Asian satires, like their Russian counterparts, listened to loud, raucous music, sometimes specifically identified as jazz or rock, performed the wild, “disorderly” dances favored among American youth, and fawned over Western fashions. The primary channels through which youth in the Soviet Union would fall under the influence of these pernicious Western fashions, according to press representations, were imported goods and imported Western media, especially music and films.³¹ In one Uzbek-language text satirizing the younger generation’s love of imported clothing, three *stiliagi* hear that a local shop is selling foreign-made pants. After marveling over the quality of the stitching and the fabric and its superiority to any domestically-made product, they find out that the label on the pants reading “S.Sh.A.” does not refer to the United States of America (*Soedinennye Shtaty Ameriki*) but rather to the Samarkand Pants-making Artel (*Samarqand Shimchilik*

³¹ Puzzlingly, although in some cases these ideologically questionable goods and media were transmitted illicitly or via the black market, as in the case of the individual resellers (Rus. *fartsovshchiki*) of Western jeans, t-shirts, and cassette tapes, it was also not unusual for them to be made available through official channels. On Soviet theaters showing “bourgeois” films, see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 39-40. Chapter 5 will examine a few cases of individual experiences of obtaining Western clothing and music through grey and black market channels in Central Asia.

Arteli).³² The *stiliagi* are thus characterized as shallow, ignorant, and slavishly deferential to Western fashions, more concerned with the symbolism of the foreign label than with the quality of the product itself. Even more pointedly, an early Brezhnev-era cartoon portrayed a number of respectable Uzbek youth entering a movie theater showing what appears to be a glamorous and violent Hollywood film (identified in the caption as a “bourgeois” (*burjua*) film) only to emerge immediately afterward as disheveled, disorderly *stiliagi* types (Figure 4.7).³³ In addition to Soviet political signifiers – the youngest child in the image sheds his red Young Pioneer handkerchief after viewing the film – the violation of locally specific and gendered norms of Central Asian dress is again used to underscore the transformation: some of the young men enter the theater wearing the Uzbek *do'ppi* skull cap, which they afterward have abandoned, and a young woman's hemline moves from a modest calf length before the film to scandalously above the knee afterward.

Discussions about the corrupting influences of contemporary media, however, did not limit themselves to a Cold War-era preoccupation with the infiltration of bourgeois ideas and products from the West. Less pronounced but still active during this period were concerns about the potentially corrupting influences of cultural and technological novelties more generally, including the Soviet-endorsed phenomenon of television. While personal ownership of televisions in the Central Asian republics tended to lag slightly behind ownership figures in the USSR more generally, by 1969 televisions were present in a majority of urban homes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and a significant minority of rural ones.³⁴ As television became an increasingly regularized part of daily life in Central Asia, the local-language press began to concern itself with the question of how much time children should be allowed

³² Nusratillo Rahmatov, “Shim,” *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1973): 10.

³³ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1967): 11.

³⁴ 1969 surveys by the republican Central Statistical Administrations recorded ownership of televisions in about 62% of surveyed urban Uzbek and Kyrgyz households, 43% of rural (*kolkhoz*) Uzbek households, and 36% of rural Kyrgyz households. TsGA RUz, F. 1619, Op. 4, d. 4260; TsGA KR, F. 105, Op. 33, d. 3954.



Figure 4.7. Harmful foreign influences through cinema. Caption: “Entering a bourgeois film... and exiting.” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1967): 11.

to watch television in a single day, and satirical cartoons reflected anxieties about the potential social and cultural impacts of this technological novelty. As early as 1961, a *Mushtum* cartoon fretted that children who were supposed to be doing their homework might be sneaking a peek at the racy television programs watched by their parents (indicated by a man and woman kissing onscreen), while a 1978 image showed a television growing tentacles to reach out and ensnare the captivated members of a Kyrgyz family.³⁵

A rather amusing counterpoint to the moral panic about the negative influence of television-watching on children is a curious recurring motif in the Uzbek-language *Mushtum* of the 1970s: television as a potentially corrupting influence on elderly men as well, specifically through the medium of women's figure skating.³⁶ Soviet media and official rhetoric during this period tended to hail athletics as a progressive and cultured pursuit for young women, but in Central Asia many parents remained reluctant to allow their daughters to engage in sport, particularly when it involved public bodily display and dress that was regarded as too revealing, as in the case of gymnastics and figure skating.³⁷ As will be discussed in more detail below, the question of the increasing visibility of the female body in the post-war period, while not unique to the Central Asian context, was made more culturally laden and anxious by the history of violent conflict over veiling in the Stalin-era 1920s and 1930s. In these 1970s *Mushtum* satires, the connection between athletics and the visibility of the female body is made explicit, and television – even what is presumably regarded as ideologically sound, solidly Soviet programming – becomes a unique medium for purveying sexual titillation to Central Asian men. In some cases, the voyeuristic viewers of televised figure skating are men specifically identified as religious, and the satire's

³⁵ *Mushtum* no. 1 (Jan. 1961); image by M. Tomilov, *Chalkan* no. 8 (Aug. 1978): 11.

³⁶ I have found four cartoons on this theme, created by different artists between 1974 and 1978: image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15; image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7; image by L. Sharifzhonova, *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9; and image by T. Jamoidinnov, *Mushtum* no. 8 (Apr. 1978): 8.

³⁷ *Pervyi s'ezd zhenshchin Uzbekistana, 7 - 8 marta 1958 goda: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Tashkent, 1959), 78.

underlying anxiousness and ambivalence is leavened by a reassuringly boilerplate Soviet critique of religious hypocrisy. A 1975 variation on this theme, for instance, depicts a turbaned and bearded old man, evidently an Islamic religious practitioner, offering religious services to a woman with a veil pulled modestly across her face. He is interrupted by a child holding the sports page of the newspaper, who whispers, “Hurry up, grandfather, it’s three minutes until the figure skating starts” (Figure 4.8).³⁸

In other cases, though, the male viewer is not specifically vilified but is merely caught in a moment of relatively harmless embarrassment, as in a 1974 image in which an old man is scolded by his wife for becoming a bit too absorbed in a women’s figure skating broadcast: “Hey, you incorrigible old man, your tea has gotten cold!” (Figure 4.9).³⁹ Here the function of the satire, beyond its laconic humor, is less obvious. Both the elderly couple and their home in this cartoon are resolutely traditional; they sit on floor cushions around a low table drinking tea and eating bread, while the television stands as the sole marker of the intrusion of contemporary life into their domestic Central Asian idyll. But it would be difficult to read the television as an entirely harmful object in this scene. Like consumer culture more broadly, the television was treated in Soviet rhetoric as a potential source of the dangers of philistinism and excess, but simultaneously as one component of the abundance, comfort, and cultural development enabled by socialism in its humane post-Stalinist incarnation. From this latter perspective, the image of an elderly, otherwise traditionalist Central Asian couple drinking tea while watching television could practically serve as an advertisement for the success of the Soviet system. Indeed, an ethnographic study of Kyrgyz villages published in the same year as this cartoon boasted that the homes of the rural population were increasingly adorned by “televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, polished imported furniture, transistor radio receivers, and so on,” with these objects serving

³⁸ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7.

³⁹ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15.



Figure 4.8. “Hurry up, grandfather, it’s three minutes until the figure skating starts...” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7.



Figure 4.9. “Hey, you incorrigible old man, your tea has gotten cold!” Source: Image by T. Muhammedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15.

as an index for the economic and cultural progress that had been achieved since the 1950s.⁴⁰ But the Soviet ambivalence about the potentially corrupting effects of luxury were picked up and amplified in the Central Asian context, becoming entangled with concerns about the newly prevalent exposure of female flesh and the slippage of standards of sexual morality.

Most widespread and conflicted of all of the recurrent tropes about the harmful influences of contemporary life on Central Asian youth, however, was the narrative of young men and women traveling from the village to the city, usually in order to attend university, and returning to their parents radically transformed, almost always for the worse. “Afandi’s son finished his studies,” begins one Uzbek-language joke printed in 1972, “and returned to the village as a flaming *stiliaga* [*qishloqqa qip-qizil stilyaga bo’lib qaytdi*].”⁴¹ The problematic nature of this narrative within Soviet discourse has already been noted in regard to the Kyrgyz satire of Baaly and her mother: forces ordinarily held up as progressive – the modern and “international” urban milieu and, especially, university education – are instead tarnished by association with immoral *stiliagi* culture. It was possible to alleviate some of this dissonance by identifying *stiliagi* not just as university students, but as especially bad students, as a 1978 Uzbek cartoon did with the caption: “These are the youths who failed in their studies in the city [*shaharda o’qishni ‘qoyillatib’*] and came back as *stiliagi*.”⁴² In Baaly’s case, too, it is her traditionally dressed, long-braided figure that is linked with images of notebooks and writing implements, indicating her status as a model Soviet student prior to leaving for Frunze; after her time in the capital, by contrast, these objects have been replaced by various items of cosmetics, with the implication that vanity and consumerism have supplanted her former academic diligence (see Figure 4.1). But the uncomfortable link between an urban Soviet education and moral degeneration is made more pointedly in a Kyrgyz

⁴⁰ S.M. Abramzon, G.N. Simakov, and L.A. Firshtein, “Nov’ kirgizskogo sela,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 5 (1974): 33.

⁴¹ *Mushtum* no. 8 (Apr. 1972): 13.

⁴² Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 2 (Jan. 1978): 3.

satirical poem from 1965, which ends by asking of the young woman who has returned from the city wearing pants and short hair, “Are these clothes the education that you have gained?”⁴³

The point of all of this does not seem to have been a comprehensive rejection of the Soviet value of education. For one thing, the Soviet state’s promotion of education, including education for young women, seems to have been a relatively high-priority and non-negotiable policy, constituting one of the hard limits placed on public discourse under Soviet rule. Even apart from this, though, the positive valuation of education, even women’s education, appears to have been internalized to some degree in local discourse, becoming a constituent part of the ideal of the restrained and responsible youth who is deferential to the authority of elders and respectful of local social and cultural norms. Occasionally, these model youths could take the place of elderly traditionalists in satirical cartoons as the moral foil for *stiliagi*. In one particularly richly layered example, two *stiliagi* mock a young Uzbek woman by saying, “Even though that girl studies in the fifth course [at university], she must be very backward [*juda qoloq ekan*] – just look at what she’s wearing!” (Figure 4.10).⁴⁴ In fact, the young woman is shown wearing the type of dress that had come to be defined as the quintessential Uzbek “national” dress for everyday wear by the post-war period – knee-length and modern in cut, but made from Uzbek *atlas* silk cloth.⁴⁵ Contrasted with her *stiliagi* ridiculers, she represents a model Soviet Central Asian youth, characterized by a fusion of socialist values (university education and the simple, functional elegance of her clothing), local ideals of femininity (long hair, graceful stride, and modestly downturned gaze), and ethnic distinctiveness and authenticity.

Yet this seemingly harmonious Soviet-Central Asian ideal is again complicated by the way that the Soviet epithet “backward” is deliberately discredited by being placed in the mouths of *stiliagi* youth.

⁴³ Image by Ch. Kyrkbaev, *Chalkan* no. 3 (Mar. 1965): 4.

⁴⁴ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 21 (Nov. 1967).

⁴⁵ The canonization of this style of dress as “national” is discussed in Chapter 1.



Figure 4.10. The *stiliagi* and the university student. Caption: “Even though that girl studies in the fifth course, she must be very backward – just look at what she’s wearing!” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 21 (Nov. 1967).

As we have already seen in the satire of Baaly and her mother, the lack of clarity on the question of whether the “foreign,” culturally inauthentic influences being decried were Western, Russian, or even Soviet in origin constituted a further ideologically awkward component of these narratives of wayward Central Asian youth. In a letter to the editor published in the Kyrgyz women’s journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* in 1983, the writer lays out a story eerily reminiscent of that of Baaly and her mother, but in this case presented as fact rather than as satire. Printed under the heading “An appeal to young women” (“Kyzdarga kairyluu”), the letter attacks the new clothing, hairstyles, and forms of behavior adopted by young Kyrgyz women under the influence of urban life.⁴⁶ During his youth a few decades earlier, the letter-writer recounts, a girl from his mountain village traveled to the city to study, and when she returned to visit he was surprised to see her “dressed like a city person [*shaardyktarcha kiyingen*].” The girl greeted her mother by saying, in a mix of Kyrgyz and Russian, “Are you well, *mama* [*salamatsyngby mama*]?” The mother stared at her for a moment, then responded reproachfully that she did not recognize this girl as her daughter: “My daughter had a long dress, and her hair was long as well... Aside from that, to say ‘*mama*’ [Rus.] instead of saying ‘mother’ [Kyrg. *ene*], showing my motherly love in carrying her with aching back for nine months and feeding her with my milk, would be beyond all limits.” As in the account of Baaly, the use of various Russianisms in Kyrgyz conversation joins the ranks of the cosmetic hand mirror and the foreign fashion label as a diagnostic marker of *stiliagi* degeneration and inauthenticity. The remarkably acerbic response of the mother in this case hints at some of the intense emotional content that surrounded the subject of Russian influence and ethnic authenticity within Soviet Central Asian discourse – the intimacy of the “national” as contrasted with the alienation from the “foreign” – but which seems out of place alongside the official rhetoric of harmonious mutual cultural influence and “internationalism.”

⁴⁶ A. Amatshanvov, “Kyzdarga kairyluu,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 1 (Jan. 1983): 22.

In a few cases, Central Asian satires went as far as to present fashions that were not the flamboyant styles of the *stiliagi*, but rather the comparatively respectable European-style suits of the Russified urban milieu, as the visual indicators of moral degeneration under modern conditions. As before, this implication is mostly made by means of a visual contrast rather than explicit text, with the suit-wearing individual, shown behaving in an impolite or offensive way, juxtaposed with a traditionally-dressed elderly person. Often, the palatably “Soviet” content of these satires is a critique of bureaucratism and officials who ignore their responsibilities toward the ordinary people: the European-styled Uzbek or Kyrgyz bureaucrat ignores or condescends to the workers and collective farmers who have come to see him and who, significantly, are portrayed wearing elements of ethnically distinctive dress. In one Kyrgyz example, titled “The bureaucrat at home,” a man in a suit turns away his traditionally dressed father-in-law with the classic bureaucratic reply, “I’m busy, tell him to come back tomorrow.”⁴⁷ Evidently the Soviet rhetoric against bureaucratism, like the critiques of *stiliaga* youth culture, could take on additional implications as a critique of Russification when deployed in the Central Asian context. Perhaps the least subtle version of this pattern of linking Russification to moral degeneration, however, is found in an Uzbek satirical cartoon from 1977, which posits a rather respectable-looking Russified man as the intermediary stage in the “evolution of external appearance” from a traditional Uzbek village man to an outrageously dressed *stiliaga* (Figure 4.11).⁴⁸ His changes in clothing, hairstyle, and posture are accompanied by modifications to his name, from the Uzbek “Jo’ra,” to the Russified spelling of “Zhora,” and finally to the classically *stiliaga* “Zhorzhik,” formed by appending the Russian diminutive –ik to the American name “George.” Although it is nowhere explicitly stated, it is easy to read this “evolutionary” progression as implying that Russified Uzbeks were already one step along a path leading to corruption, inauthenticity, and cultural loss.

⁴⁷ Image by Ch. Kyrkbaev, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1976): 6.

⁴⁸ Image by L. Sharifjonova, *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9.



Figure 4.11. “The evolution of external appearance.” Source: Image by L. Sharifjonova, *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9.

In the context of the post-war period, discourse throughout the Soviet Union shifted in the direction of a rehabilitation of cultural conservatism and the decorous, staid morality associated with the rural population and the older generation, viewed as a counterweight to the uncertainty and degeneracy of modern urban life. Where this turn toward the past, toward nostalgia, traditionalism, and rural life, has typically been identified as a unique phenomenon of the Russian experience in the late Soviet Union – sometimes with the assumption that the growing interest in Russianness and Russian nationalism entailed a corresponding curtailment of non-Russian ethnic expression – the experience in Central Asia seems to have echoed the Russian one rather than existing in a zero-sum relationship with

it.⁴⁹ In the Central Asian case, moreover, this nostalgic turn took the form of a revitalized interest in both ethnic distinctiveness and traditional social and cultural values, facilitating not just an appeal to Central Asian rural life and its virtues, but also an examination of the moral hazards of modern Soviet society. Russified urban areas were no longer only centers of modernity and enlightenment, but as the main hotbeds of dissolute youth culture, could also become sites of moral degeneration; traditionalist rural areas, while by no means free from insinuations of backwardness, could now also be proffered as bastions of exactly those “Soviet” virtues that were increasingly under threat – industriousness, respectability, self-control, modesty.

Gender-bending, sexuality, and the construction of Soviet Central Asian gender norms

It is already clear from the above examples that the issues of gender, gendered roles within the family, gendered standards of dress, and gendered concerns about sexual propriety and modesty served as recurring fascinations for the post-war Central Asian satirical press. In particular, satirical stories and cartoons employed young people’s violations of gender-specific norms of dress – whether male or female – as both a metaphor for and a direct manifestation of the ways in which Central Asian social relationships had been thrown into flux in modern, urban, consumerist conditions. On one level, the special concern with clothing, and especially with women’s clothing, might be imagined as a distant echo of the events surrounding the 1927 campaign against veiling in Central Asia, when changes in female dress became intensely politicized and associated, among both advocates and opponents of unveiling, with cultural revolution and social upheaval.⁵⁰ In the wake of the veil’s decline over the post-war

⁴⁹ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ On the Soviet unveiling campaign and resistance to it, see Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; and Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*. Massell, in particular, argues that the Bolshevik decision to target gender and the veil was calculated to disrupt Central Asian society at a fundamental level and thus open it up for revolutionary transformation.

decades, the subject of women's dress was no longer as violently polarized as before, but it continued to be a focus of social anxieties, invested with particular moral significance. Like opponents of unveiling had in the 1920s, the Central Asian press underscored the rhetorical link between the regulation of women's dress and the maintenance of proper gender distinctions, sexual morality, and social order. It also linked the most threatening changes in women's dress to the complex of modern, urban, foreign, and even Russian or Soviet influences decried in satires on *stiliagi* more generally.

While the particular history of the Soviet unveiling campaign served as the constant backdrop of these discussions, though, the preoccupation with changing women's styles in conjunction with new commodities and consumption practices was not unique to Central Asia. In fact, many researchers have found it to be a recurring feature of debates about modernity and ethnic identity in many parts of the world during the 20th century. Caricatured representations of the fashion-obsessed, voraciously consumerist, and sexualized "Modern Girl" were deployed in a wide variety of contexts to critique the transgression of boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity, and nation brought about by the global movement of commodities and the expansion of consumer culture.⁵¹ Central Asian satirical discourses shared with these other representations of the "Modern Girl" the icons of the mirror, cosmetics, and fashion magazine, which together suggested that this type of young woman had forsaken traditional feminine roles and virtues in favor of frivolity, self-centeredness, and consumerism. In caricatures of such young women in early 20th century China, like in post-war Central Asia, the vanity or hand-held mirror became an especially ubiquitous and potent symbol: in addition to soliciting the male gaze, these caricatures suggested, the Modern Girl "also gazes at herself: she is narcissistic and consciously makes herself sexually attractive."⁵² Such images thus packaged together consumerism, decadent materialism and self-centeredness, and hyper-sexualization or sexual aggressiveness in a way that made the Modern

⁵¹ Alys Weinbaum et al., eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵² Madeleine Y. Dong, "Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?", in *Modern Girl Around the World*, 208.

Girl a convenient target for attack from socialists, advocates of national identity, and defenders of traditionalist morality alike. Additionally, although the topic of “race” as such was largely absent from Soviet discourse, the Central Asian-language press did express concerns about the erosion of local standards of feminine beauty in favor of a sort of de-ethnicized “fashionable” standard, which in some ways resembled anxieties about racial boundary-crossing and racial shame that new commodities (especially cosmetics) elicited within South Africa and the United States in the first half of the 20th century.⁵³ Satirical images and texts fretted that young Central Asian women were at risk of falling under the influence of alien standards of beauty and, as a result, neglecting or deliberately destroying the features that were valued within the local feminine ideal. As we have seen in the story of Baaly, this could include dyeing the hair blonde, shearing off the long thick braids in favor of a more “modern” short hairstyle, and heavily using cosmetics. A 1958 cartoon from *Mushtum* made this transition from a local feminine ideal to a foreign one explicit, juxtaposing a long-haired, clean-faced Uzbek woman with the caption, “She used to be as beautiful as the moon,” with her appearance after excessive exposure to foreign fashion magazines (Figure 4.12).⁵⁴ The title attached to the image – “The result of too much imitation!” – and the blonde-haired women on the covers of many of the corrupting magazines signaled that the problem was one not only of female immodesty, but also of artificiality, of adopting alien and superficial standards of feminine beauty, and of straying from ethnic authenticity.

Perhaps the most unmistakable preoccupation of the post-war satirical press, however, was the bodily exposure of women, and above all of female *stiliagi*. It is certainly revealing that while the figure of the *stiliaga* tended to be gendered male in the Russian context,⁵⁵ in Central Asian-language satires it

⁵³ Lynn M. Thomas, “The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa,” in *Modern Girl Around the World*, 108.

⁵⁴ Image by Ra’no Ismatova, “Ortiqcha taqlidchilik oqibati!”, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Dec. 1958): 9.

⁵⁵ This claim is made both in Juliane Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 218; and in Brandon Gray Miller, “Between Creation and Crisis: Soviet Masculinities, Consumption, and Bodies after Stalin,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Michigan State University, 2013), 135.



Figure 4.12. “The result of too much imitation!” Caption: “She used to be as beautiful as the moon...”
 Source: Image by Ra’no Ismatova, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Dec 1958): 9.

was overwhelmingly represented as female. Exposure of female flesh, for reasons that are not too difficult to imagine, routinely stood in for all of the excess, immorality, and social disruption that were imagined as the consequences of unrestrained consumerism. But it is also striking that the satirical press seems almost as concerned with visualizing and depicting “immodest” *stiliagi* women as with criticizing them. In their rawest form, representations of exposed female bodies in the local-language press were accompanied by remarkably little in the way of political commentary or satirical interpretation; in any number of cartoons in Uzbek and Kyrgyz journals of the post-war decades, the “joke,” to the extent that there was one, rested on a man gawking at a woman in a revealing dress. Even in the absence of overtly moralizing commentary, though, many of these images implicitly connected changing women’s fashions to male temptation and to the danger of sexual impropriety, with a man’s gaze being led away from his wife and toward an unknown young woman (Figure 4.13). It could be said that the dangers of seduction were both represented and replayed in the pages of these journals. There are a small number of cases where cartoonists seem to have made an effort to depict



Figure 4.13. The moral hazards of new consumption habits. No caption. Source: Image by M. Tomilov, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1966): 10.

exposed (often explicitly *stiliagi*) women as either comical or self-evidently repugnant, exaggerating their garishness or slovenliness. Just as often, however, what was exaggerated was instead their sexual desirability. In depictions of scantily dressed women, the curvature of breasts, thighs and calves was outlined in meticulous detail, the narrowness of waists and ankles heightened beyond realistic bounds. Very frequently, the ostensible object of moral condemnation was thus portrayed – rather overtly, it could be said – as an object of desire as well. There is, of course, nothing uniquely Central Asian about this duality. But within the cultural context of Soviet Central Asia, the visibility of the female body in public spaces was a relatively recent phenomenon, and often implicitly understood as a direct byproduct of Soviet or Russian influence.⁵⁶ The ambivalence inherent in these images – the blending of enticement

⁵⁶ David Abramson observes this phenomenon near the end of the Soviet period, in the late 1980s and 1990s, manifested in a view of “Russian and European women as sexually promiscuous and therefore as available for liaisons” as well as street harassment of Uzbek women dressed in miniskirts accompanied by shouts of “Dress like

and moral danger – was thus not merely ambivalence toward female sexuality, but also toward the post-war cultural milieu that intermingled women's emancipation and fashionable consumption to make the public display of sexualized femininity possible.

Alongside vicarious titillation, then, images that represented exposed female bodies under the gazes of strangers and in public spaces – streets, squares, parks, public transit – both worked to foster a sense that women's dress was subject to continuous communal scrutiny and construed this scrutinizing community as a distinctly local, Central Asian one. One studiously ambiguous 1969 cartoon depicted a voluptuous young woman squirming uncomfortably under the stare of a young man sitting across from her on a Tashkent tram. “Why are you staring like that, aren't you ashamed?” she asks, trying to pull her short dress down over her legs. “You dressed that way so that men would look at you, sweetheart,” he replies (Figure 4.14).⁵⁷ If the young man himself hardly makes for a commendable figure – in the visual language of the late Soviet press, he possesses the slouching posture and coiffed hair that typically signified male *stiliagi* – he both serves as a surrogate for the disapproving/desiring gaze of the presumed reader and has the privilege of delivering the final word and punchline. He is, perhaps, also implicated in the degeneration in sexual morality on display, but its primary locus remains the woman's exposed body, and its root cause lies with the contravention of gendered norms enabled within contemporary consumer culture. At the edge of the frame, an elderly, bearded Uzbek man wearing a traditional-style *do'ppi* sits as the silent witness of this exchange. A decade earlier, a similar cartoon had appointed no less venerable a figure than the 15th-century Central Asian poet Alisher Navoiy as the witness and voice of communal reprobation. In this case, the image shows a young Uzbek woman in a short dress sitting on a bench in a public square and, in classic “Modern Girl” fashion, applying makeup while gazing into a mirror. The statue of Alisher Navoiy presiding over the square throws his arm in

an Uzbek girl!” David Abramson, “Engendering Citizenship in post-Communist Uzbekistan,” *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 71.

⁵⁷ Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Aug. 1969): 4.



Figure 4.14. Satire of women’s dress under public scrutiny. Caption: – “Why are you staring like that, aren’t you ashamed?” – “You dressed that way so that men would look at you, sweetheart.” Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Aug. 1969): 4.

front of his eyes and delivers a famous line from his poem “Farhod va Shirin”: “Let my eyes fall out, rather than see you this way!” (Figure 4.15).⁵⁸

Excessive makeup, low-cut dresses, short skirts, and hyper-sexualization were not the only ways that young *stiliagi* women could violate Central Asian gendered norms of dress, however. Such women were, somewhat counterintuitively, often accused of androgyny as well. In fact, *stiliagi* of both genders were subject to critique on the grounds that they blurred or inverted conventional gender norms.

⁵⁸ L. Oxunjonov, image by N. Leushin, “Navoiy haykali tagida,” *Mushtum* no. 14 (Jul. 1959).



Figure 4.15. “Under the Navoiy monument.” Caption: Navoiy – “Let my eyes fall out, rather than see you this way!” Source: L. Oxunjonov, image by N. Leushin, *Mushtum* no. 14 (Jul. 1959).

Women cropped their hair short and wore slacks; men grew their hair long and wore the bright colors and flamboyant patterns that were locally associated with feminine modes of dress; and both adhered to similar Western fashion trends and engaged in similar public behaviors, like smoking cigarettes.⁵⁹ Cartoons that represented male and female *stiliagi* as virtually indistinguishable from one another due to their preferred hairstyles and fashions became a recurring genre in the Central Asian satirical press in the post-war decades. The cover image of a 1974 issue of Uzbekistan's *Mushtum*, for example, showed one young person – long-haired, in platform shoes and flared trousers, smoking, accessorized with an imported handbag – handing a flower to another figure of nearly identical appearance. The image was published for the International Women's Day holiday, when men throughout the Soviet Union conventionally offered flowers and well-wishes to women; but in this case, the caption noted, the gender roles were ambiguous: Who was offering the flower to whom (Figure 4.16)?⁶⁰ The danger of confusion and social disruption arising from such androgyny was typically played up in these satires, which again made liberal use of public spaces and strangers' gazes, often adopting the perspective of an outside observer caught in a moment of ambiguity or, worse, mistaking one gender for the other. "Who is the young woman [*kelin*], and who is the young man?" asked a 1961 Kyrgyz-language poem titled "A difficult and mysterious riddle," with an image depicting two short-haired young people wearing similar garishly colored t-shirts.⁶¹ A 1971 variant in *Mushtum* showed two elderly women speculating as to which was the male member of a young couple, indistinguishable when seen from behind due to their similarly long hair and identical jackets and slacks.⁶² Although it was typically handled only obliquely, the blurring of the boundary between male and female was at times linked to the danger of sexual

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the role of color in gendered norms of dress, see Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1974).

⁶¹ B. Momunbekov, "Tataal syrduu tabyshmak," *Chalkan* no. 12 (Dec. 1961): 10.

⁶² Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 2 (Jan. 1971): 9.



Figure 4.16. Blurring of gender boundaries in *stiliagi* youth culture. Caption: “A picture-riddle. Who is congratulating whom?” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1974).

confusion as well, as in a 1980 sketch in *Chalkan* that showed a man hopefully offering flowers to a long-haired figure on a park bench, only to be knocked flat in cartoonish shock when that figure turned out to be a man sporting a mustache (Figure 4.17).⁶³ The consistent linkage that these satires established between youth trends and the disruption of conventional gender norms implicated consumer culture in an unmooring of post-war Central Asian society from its foundations, even while suggesting the need to reaffirm a gendered social order under modern, Soviet conditions.

To be sure, many of these same anxieties about the shifting of gender roles and gendered self-presentations as a result of contact with Western goods and fashions can be found in Soviet Russia's satirical press during this period.⁶⁴ Yet in the Central Asian case, these anxious discourses about gender frequently folded in a set of specifically local idioms and associations that both grounded the problem in local social life and freighted it with additional cultural baggage. Take, for instance, an Uzbek-language joke printed in 1972:

When Afandi woke up in the morning, his pants were not where he had left them. Surprised, he got out of bed and asked his wife where they were. She answered, laughing, "Husband, your daughter left this morning wearing your pants." Afandi shook his head and said to his wife: "And I always thought it was in vain that they had scolded you, saying, 'If only you had given birth to a son...'"⁶⁵

To begin with, aside from the folksy "Central Asianness" conferred on the joke through the inclusion of Afandi as the protagonist, the notion that wearing slacks still constituted a mildly gender-bending act for a woman in the 1970s was somewhat specific to Central Asia. Note, for instance, the admonition in a 1974 Soviet Uzbek advice article, which admitted that although trousers (Uzb. *shim*) were increasingly regarded as fashionable among young women, "this article of clothing is not very suitable for wear on

⁶³ Image by A. Abdurakhmanov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1980): 7.

⁶⁴ Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 225-226; Brandon Gray Miller, "Between Creation and Crisis," 176.

⁶⁵ *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1972): 13.

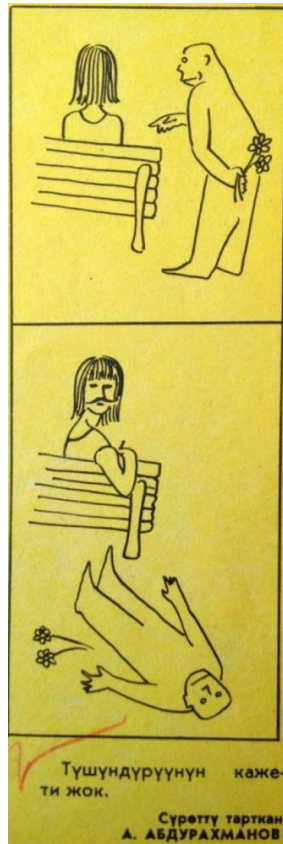


Figure 4.17. Androgyny and sexual confusion. Caption: “No explanation necessary.” Source: Image by A. Abdurakhmanov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1980): 7.

the street in our conditions,” and ought to be worn only within the home.⁶⁶ Satirical cartoons printed in Kyrgyzstan around this time reiterated the notion that this act entailed a transgression of gender and familial roles, showing young women wearing trousers that they had, as in the Afandi joke, specifically borrowed from their fathers. In one cartoon, the implications of cross-dressing and gender reversal were played up even further, with the young woman dressed in her father’s full professional attire –

⁶⁶ “Uy libosi,” *Saodat* no. 7 (Jul. 1974).

suit, tie, and fur cap – and him asking in return, “Am I supposed to wear your skirt to work?!” (Figure 4.18).⁶⁷

Yet in the Afandi joke cited above, the punchline not only suggests that the act of wearing trousers masculinizes a young woman, but draws in a locally specific touchstone for gender differences (and inequities) in the prescribed reproach to a young mother who bore a daughter: “If only you had given birth to a son [Uzb. *sen o’g’il tug’maysan*].” If the customary expression of a preference for sons over daughters was hardly unique to Central Asian cultures, in this case it was undeniably local in provenance, written into this 1972 Soviet journal precisely because it would have been recognizable from the social life and shared cultural vocabulary of Uzbek readers. In a sense, this punchline serves to re-stabilize the division between male and female by contextualizing the young woman’s act within a particularly Uzbek version of the gender binary. Part of the effect – and perhaps, also the intention – of discourses about youth, gender, and consumption in the local-language press was thus to offer commentary on these contemporary issues in a distinctly Central Asian voice. Not just language, but also images, tropes, and associations were localized in these post-war satirical discourses, and the result was to create layers of meaning on top of, and to a degree interwoven with, the meanings conveyed in Russian-language Soviet discourse.

To give an additional example, another fragment of Central Asian culture that was periodically trotted out to comment on the violation of gendered norms among young *stiliagi* was a proverb (evidently existing in both Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages) that jocularly derided women as “long in hair, short on wits” (Uzb. *sochi uzun, aqli qisqa*; Kyrg. *chachy uzun, aklyly kyska*). Once again, the recognizability of this adage to a local audience was crucial, and as in the case of the phrase “if only you had given birth to a son,” its deployment in an unexpected context was probably intended for humorous effect. But beyond this, and perhaps less intentionally, it contextualized Soviet-era concerns about

⁶⁷ Image by O. Kasmaliev, *Chalkan* no. 12 (Dec. 1983): 7; Image by Zh. Baibachaev, *Chalkan* no. 3 (Mar. 1976): 10.



Figure 4.18. “Am I supposed to wear your skirt to work?!” Source: Image by O. Kasmaliev, *Chalkan* no. 12(Dec. 1983): 7.

gender and the growing mutability of gender roles within a locally specific set of beliefs, attitudes, and conceptions of maleness and femaleness. The new meanings that were generated through this juxtaposition were multi-layered and at times contradictory. On the one hand, the phrase “long in hair, short on wits” could be applied to a long-haired man in a way that disavowed its implicit denigration of women even while making use of that denigration to imply that *stiliagi* men were both feminized and unintelligent: “His father used to say that women are long in hair and short on wits,” two Uzbek women watching a long-haired man walk by ironically comment (Figure 4.19).⁶⁸ On the other hand, the phrase

⁶⁸ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 13 (Jul. 1972): back cover.

could be placed in the mouth of a young woman as a justification for her decision to cut her hair short: “Let’s see what the people who say ‘long in hair, short on wits’ will say now!” (Figure 4.20).⁶⁹ This latter use would almost seem to recast a woman’s decision to shear her hair off as an admirable, or at least sympathetic, act of empowerment and self-redefinition – except that the young woman in the image is portrayed with the telltale cosmetics and hand mirror that were utilized in the Central Asian press to signify the narcissistic, self-absorbed, socially irresponsible female consumer. Disentangling the competing meanings at play here is difficult, other than to say, in the most general sense, that both of the above examples comment on the tension between contemporary youth styles and conventional Central Asian ideas about gender. But in some ways, it is precisely the density, complexity, and ambiguity of these examples that is the point. They demonstrate that the interplay of all-union and local discourses about consumption and modernity spawned new cultural content that was both deeply embedded in local life and only weakly controlled by the strictures of Soviet political correctness. The muddled, ideologically un-worked out way that Central Asian tropes and images were deployed in the satirical press suggests neither a cynical state effort to find a “national” vessel for “socialist content” nor a pre-meditated Central Asian effort to smuggle oppositional messages into print. It suggests, instead, a process of groping toward a normative response to increasingly unmoored social and gender relations – a process in which elements of both Soviet rhetoric and purely local discourses occupied a foundational place as cultural “givens.”

As in the case of critiques of *stiliagi* more generally, explorations of how consumer culture threatened existing regimes of gender and sexual regulation created a forum in the local press for the elaboration of a locally specific set of concerns and values. At times, the ways that all-Soviet and locally specific images and tropes overlapped and interfered with one another generated genuinely unexpected

⁶⁹ Image by lusupov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun.1960): 6. For a similar example, see “Ailasyn tapty,” *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1966): 8.



Figure 4.19. “His father used to say that women are long in hair and short on wits...” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 13 (Jul. 1972).



Figure 4.20. “Let’s see what people who say ‘long in hair, short on wits’ will say now!” Source: Image by Yusupov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1960): 6.

results, including the ability to articulate critiques of Soviet modernity and Russian cultural influence beyond the normal bounds of Soviet permissibility. Yet perhaps the most powerful outcomes of this interplay of central and local discourses lay at the points where they reinforced one another – in their attacks on feminized men, masculinized women, sexual immodesty, and youth out of control. Although shot through with ambivalences and anxieties, in many respects the net effect of these discourses was to reconstruct and reinforce a local set of gendered norms of dress and behavior that were grounded in the points of overlap between Soviet and Central Asian moralities.

Conclusion

The specter of dissolute youth culture and fears of a rising tide of consumer acquisitiveness and “bourgeois mentalities” in the post-war period created a situation in which Central Asian tradition and ethno-cultural specificity could be reframed in the public discourse of the region as a potentially healthy influence, bolstering Soviet values in their struggle against excessive, rootless consumerism. In contrast to the antagonistic state rhetoric about Central Asian family structures and values that had prevailed during the 1920s and 1930s, the official Soviet Central Asian press under Khrushchev and Brezhnev frequently appealed to traditionalism, the authority of elders over youth (and especially over young women), and the defense of national distinctiveness as checks on the perceived dangers of out-of-control consumerism. Discussions about consumption within the Soviet Central Asian public sphere thus facilitated a rapprochement, and to some degree cross-pollination, between central and local, state and non-state values and discourses. The result was change on both fronts, as Soviet discourse in the region became suffused with local ideas about modesty, family hierarchy, and cultural authenticity, and traditional Central Asian ideals and practices were being reframed in terms of the Soviet values of hard work, social responsibility, education, and consumerist restraint.

Nevertheless, tensions persisted within this Soviet-Central Asian consensus, and an examination of Central Asian satirical discourses reveals something of the extremely fraught and loaded social context in which consumption decisions would necessarily be made. Regardless of an individual consumer's intentions, their consumption choices would be read and critiqued in terms of questions of authenticity and culturedness, morality, soundness as a Soviet person or a Central Asian woman. As we will see in the next chapter, Central Asian consumers, and women in particular, were obliged to negotiate an extremely narrow and situationally shifting middle ground between being labeled as uncultured or backward and being seen as immodest or deracinated. The overlap and interplay of Soviet and Central Asian value systems could create myriad opportunities for self-expression and selective affiliation for Central Asian consumers; but in a context in which consumer choice was laden with multi-layered ideological, aesthetic, and moral implications, individuals were obliged to make decisions on the backdrop of a volatile social and cultural terrain in which the field of entirely safe and neutral options was drastically constricted.

CHAPTER FIVE

Consumer Choice, Social Norms, and Self-Fashioning in Late Soviet Central Asia, 1960s-1980s

Shoira Asadova (b. 1961, female, Uzbek) opened an album and drew out a black-and-white photograph marked with the year 1980. It showed two young women, each wearing a knee-length dress. “This is my cousin,” she said, pointing to the figure on the right. “She was a rural girl living and studying in Tashkent.” She identified herself as the figure standing on the left. She would have been nineteen at the time. “I came to visit her as a guest... I was living in the city of Bukhara, studying at the Bukhara Pedagogical Institute.” She emphasized that her cousin had grown up “in the village [Uzb. *qishloq*], in the countryside,” while she had lived her entire life in Bukhara. And whereas her cousin was wearing a dress “sewn in the Uzbek style [Russ. *na Uzbekskii lad sshito*], made from Japanese silk,” she herself was dressed in “a burgundy skirt and a burgundy blouse.” “But,” she continued, again pointing to the figure of her cousin, “I would not wear that sort of dress to the institute.” When asked to explain, she promptly replied, “Because it is too national [*slishkom natsional’noe*]. It is garishly colorful [*aliapisto krasochno*]. And I wouldn’t wear something that was garishly colorful. This was still in the Uzbek style, and I preferred European” (Figure 5.1).¹ While personal inclinations certainly played a role in such decisions, Asadova’s fashion preference was densely interwoven with broader social patterns and cultural meanings. The two dresses – her own and her cousin’s – were, for all their apparent similarities, differentiated by the byzantine system of rules and distinctions that governed the consumer culture of late Soviet Central Asia. Her assessment that she would not wear that sort of dress in that particular setting speaks not only to her personal experience and taste, but also to the demarcation between urban and rural social spheres, the cultural polarity of the “European” and the “national,” the material and rhetorical complexities of the “national” itself (it could, for example, include a dress made from

¹ Shoira Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.



Figure 5.1. Shoiras Asadova (left) and her cousin at the Bukhara Pedagogical Institute, 1980. Source: Shoiras Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.

imported Japanese silk), the struggle to maintain prestige and respectability within Soviet public spaces, and the complex accounting for situational requirements of dress that defined the consumer landscape in post-war Soviet Central Asia.

The preceding chapters have shown how Soviet production policy, discourses about national folk art, and local-language press debates created a volatile and shifting canvas for consumer choice in Central Asia during the final decades of Soviet rule. The Soviet state's policy of mass-producing traditional-style Central Asian clothing, furniture, decorative objects, and household implements alongside European-style ones both created an officially legitimated space for ethnic and cultural difference in the region and opened up extensive new ground for the contestation of ethnicity and culture in the local public sphere. The array of objects available to consumers was overlaid with multiple, often competing layers of meaning, speaking to questions of wealth and status, ethnic and community affiliations, ideals of modernity and culturedness, and shifting gender roles. What has so far been missing, however, is a sense of how individuals navigated among the irreconcilable expectations and double binds with which they were inevitably presented in this context, how they crafted identities and affiliations out of available consumer goods and discourses about those goods, and how their choices resonated within their particular social context. If the discourses outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 sharply distinguished "urban" and "rural" consumption patterns, in reality many Central Asians were obliged to move back and forth between the two as the situation demanded. If the local-language Soviet press positioned a "traditional" Central Asian object like the Uzbek cradle (*beshtik*) as the polar opposite of an imported t-shirt with an image of the American flag, in reality the two objects might be owned and used by the same person without any particular feeling of incongruity.² Consumer decision-making in post-war Central Asia enfolded the language and moral parameters of both official Soviet discourse and the local-language press; but rather than fitting neatly within their typologies, consumers

² Ziyoda Usmanova [pseudonym], (b. 1958, female, Uzbek), personal interview, 05 May 2014.

often sought to navigate between them, adapting themselves to different milieus and situational demands and crafting a persona through the selection of an (often idiosyncratic and individually unique) amalgamation of “national” and “European” objects. The ways that the Soviet Central Asian press depicted consumer goods were by no means irrelevant to the experiences of real consumers. As Timothy Burke has observed, “The difference between representations or social constructions and lived experience is real and meaningful, but representations form the raw material from which everyday life is shaped by human agents: representations in texts become repertoires of behavior and performance in everyday practice.”³ Nevertheless, the relationship between press discourse and lived social experience was a contingent one that cannot be predicted solely based on the nature of the discourses themselves.

For a sense of the real-world texture and subjective dynamics of consumer choice, a different set of sources is required, detailing individual decision-making processes and moments of everyday conflict surrounding objects and their meanings. In addition to examining some of the broader trends and trajectories of Central Asian consumption in the post-war period, this chapter will draw on a handful of oral history interviews with Uzbek and Kyrgyz men and women born between 1941 and 1969.⁴ These interviews will shed light on the micro-level processes of consumer choice and the densely layered social and cultural significances attached to decisions about what to purchase, wear, and use. As highly

³ Timothy Burke, “The Modern Girl and Commodity Culture,” in *Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, eds. Alys Weinbaum, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 363.

⁴ All interviews were conducted in Russian. Interviewees are designated by name unless they requested otherwise, in which case they will be identified by a pseudonym. Of eleven oral history respondents, five were Uzbek and six were Kyrgyz, and nine were female while only two were male. This gender disparity was not by design, but reflected the limitations of my personal contacts in Central Asia as well as the willingness of interview subjects to participate in the project. In part, this seems to have been due to the way that consumption, dress, and interior décor continue to be imagined as topics of primarily female interest; it also likely relates to the fact that my interview questions touched on personal history and subjective experience, which women seemed to be more comfortable discussing with a younger, foreign, female researcher than men were. It should also be noted that the gendered norms of consumption during this period tended to be much more visible and contested for women than for men, which meant that female interviewees often had a great deal to say about them while male interviewees were more reticent. Although men, too, were very much subject to gendered expectations of dress and behavior, and these will be discussed below when possible, these expectations will not receive thorough treatment here.

personal and anecdotal cases, they are not intended to offer a representative cross-section of Central Asian society; for one thing, they are far too limited in number, and for another thing, they tend to disproportionately represent members of the urban intelligentsia, especially in Uzbekistan, due in part to constraints on my contacts in the country.⁵ The aim, then, is not to present these individual cases as if they were representative or universal, but instead to roughly sketch out a possibility space within which Central Asian consumers operated and to point in a preliminary way to recurring patterns in their experiences.

What these cases reveal, first and foremost, is the way that tensions over the relationship between Europeanness and Central Asianness or internationalism and local particularism that had been initiated in the political sphere were expanded, played out, and resolved, sometimes in unanticipated ways, in the social sphere. On the one hand, consumption created the preconditions for individuals to explore alternative identifications and cultural affiliations through the acquisition and use of certain kinds of goods. This is especially visible in the post-war rise of the Western-looking *stiliagi* youth culture, but it can also be seen in the way that material “Europeanization” and the consumption of imported products (though not necessarily to the exclusion of national-style goods) became hallmarks of a Central Asian intelligentsia identity. At the same time, though, acts of self-fashioning through consumption were by no means unfettered by social norms and expectations. On an individual level, Central Asian consumers could (and often did) utilize the goods on offer in the Soviet public sphere to construct and perform various kinds of selves or to imagine membership in various kinds of communities – Uzbek or Kyrgyz, cultured or modest, Europeanized or traditionalist, intelligentsia or fashionable youth. Yet these efforts always operated within a matrix of social incentives and repercussions. Moreover, the socially enforced norms of dress, interior décor, and consumer behavior were not

⁵ In Uzbekistan, I was limited to interviewing employees of the Academy of Sciences, with which I was affiliated for my research, a measure which was advised by the director of the Institute of History as a means of circumventing restrictions on and scrutiny of foreign “journalistic” activity in the country.

homogeneous across Central Asian space, but diverged among different Soviet Central Asian “publics,” from rural villages to urban mahallas to the cosmopolitan streets of the capital cities. The consumption pattern (whether national, Europeanized, or hybrid) for which an individual expressed a personal preference and affinity was thus routinely forced to yield to situational requirements of consumption rooted in a particular social milieu. The result was a complex intermeshing of individual preference (itself socially constituted and influenced), situational adaptation, and overlapping patterns of cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical segmentation in defining the landscape of Soviet Central Asian consumer culture.

The dynamics of consumption thus expose deep divisions – in some cases one might say a bifurcation – in Central Asian society during the late Soviet period. Importantly, however, this spatial and cultural divide can, by the 1970s, no longer be understood, as it perhaps could during the Stalin-era 1920s and 1930s, as a division between “Soviet” influences and “Central Asian” ones (nor, for that matter, between “state” and “non-state” influences, much less between “modernity” and “tradition”). Not only had ethnic Central Asians supplanted ethnic “outsiders” as some of the most zealous adherents and enforcers of Europeanizing norms, but the line between state-originated and locally specific ethical and aesthetic discourses had blurred nearly to the point of indistinguishability. “Rural” or “traditionalist” consumption norms drew legitimacy from Soviet discourses on the virtue of the national as well as from a socialist suspicion of wealth and luxury, while local proponents of “Europeanization” might deploy Soviet modernization rhetoric and officially disparaged Western fashions in equal measure. This was, in many respects, the logical culmination of the processes described in the previous chapters, characterized first by an expanding umbrella of Soviet permissibility over the course of the post-war period to include diverse modes of ethnic and cultural expression, and second by the absorption of certain Soviet terminologies and values into local Central Asian discourses and individual self-narratives. The result was a kind of cultural integration of the “Soviet” and the “Central Asian,” in

which a wide range of meanings of Uzbekness and Kyrgyzzness could safely fit inside the boundaries of Soviet citizenship and belonging. Specifically, it became possible, through a selective application of official and press rhetoric, to present both Europeanized and traditionalist modes of consumption as explicitly Soviet and socialist. But this integration entailed neither the effacement of Central Asian ethno-cultural distinctiveness nor the emergence of an utterly quiescent, depoliticized social and cultural world. In fact, disagreements over fundamental values, tensions among proponents of different regimes of consumption and ways of life, and new patterns of distinction cutting across Central Asian society flourished in this comparatively permissive environment.

Categories of consumer self-description: Europeanization, culturedness, and taste

As we have seen in the previous chapters, by the time Soviet discourses about consumption had trickled down through the local-language press to the Central Asian public sphere, they had ceased to be purely formulaic and impersonal expressions of official rhetoric. Instead, they touched on the intimate details of daily life in the region, from the mundane to the intensely personal. They had something to say about ideal ways of being national and cultured and about the appropriate ways of covering (or revealing) women's bodies, and they were acquiring the flavor of a specifically local set of anxieties about modernity and cultural loss. Given all of this, it is not surprising that such discourses carried some weight in individual consumers' experiences and decision-making. Buzzwords of Soviet rhetoric like "culturedness" and "taste," the elevation of "suitability and convenience" as consumerist virtues, even the state's sharply ambivalent attitude toward wealth and luxury not only seeped into Central Asian conversations, but became embedded in an existing mesh of local associations, interpersonal relationships, and sensory experiences. This process, in which official rhetoric and state values were both transformed in accordance with local circumstances and invested with personal and affective content, may point toward an explanation for the success of Soviet language and categories in the

Central Asian context that does not resort to insinuations of inauthenticity or assumptions about the unlimited power of the Soviet state to define identities. To the extent that the language and ideas of official Soviet discourses appear in the self-narratives of Central Asians, and perhaps especially of members of the intelligentsia, these individuals were not merely reproducing the categories of the state but elaborating them in unanticipated directions.

In his study of social relations and migration among urban and rural residents of the Zambian Copperbelt, James Ferguson captures a phenomenon that will be deeply familiar to researchers of Soviet and post-Soviet republics: the widespread adoption of “standard social scientific meta-narratives of urbanization” as taken-for-granted elements of local discourse. Ferguson describes his initial consternation at finding that his informants “had little hesitation relying on the most clichéd dualist stereotypes of modernization theory in their understandings of urban life in general, and of the cultural politics of rural-urban migration in particular.” Yet rather than dismissing or attempting to circumvent the binaries that permeated his informants’ self-narratives, Ferguson seeks to grapple with the ways in which “modernization theory had become a local tongue, and sociological terminology and folk classifications had become disconcertingly intermingled in informants’ intimate personal narratives.”⁶ In the case of Soviet Central Asia as well, it is somewhat tempting to look for alternatives to the hyper-reified, Soviet-inflected language of self-description and social analysis that many Central Asians continue to employ in their personal narratives, even more than two decades after the collapse of the USSR. But the ubiquity of this language speaks to something considerably more interesting than merely the power and pervasiveness of Soviet propaganda. As in Ferguson’s study of the Zambian Copperbelt, it demonstrates the ways in which state-derived terminologies and ideas could be wielded as a tool for

⁶ James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 84.

describing lived realities, providing sense and structure to personal experiences, and positioning the self in relation to other groups within local society.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous and unavoidable official categories that made their way into local usage are the linked sets of binaries that were frequently deployed to describe a wide-ranging bifurcation in Soviet Central Asian society and culture: European/Central Asian, international/national, modern/traditional, and urban/rural. As the advice for local consumers detailed in Chapter 3 demonstrates, Soviet discourse linked urbanization, modernization, and Europeanization as conjoined elements of a progressive, evolutionary process that enfolded both consumer practices and mentalities. It was not uncommon for the terms “Russian,” “urban,” and “modern” to be used interchangeably in Soviet ethnographic works. A 1959 ethnography, for instance, optimistically described the gradual adoption of “urban Russian furniture [*gorodskaiia russkaia mebel'*],” “modern urban factory-produced beds,” and “the costume of the Russian urban type” among Uzbek factory workers in Tashkent and Andijan.⁷ A 1982 ethnographic article on rural Central Asia as a whole likewise claimed, “As a result of the convergence of the living conditions of the city and the village, a modernization and standardization of daily life is occurring, and modern, urbanized, so-called ‘city’ [*gorodskie*] forms of material culture are becoming more and more widespread for all peoples of the USSR.”⁸ In addition to their use in Soviet professional spheres, though, these interlinked sets of binaries also became key terms in Central Asians’ self-descriptions and ways of categorizing their experiences. “Make note of this,” instructed Nodira Mustofoeva (female, Uzbek, b. 1969), “I lived in a *traditional* mahalla [Uzbek neighborhood community], but I grew up with a *Europeanized* upbringing.”⁹ When her parents moved from a small *qishloq* (Uzbek

⁷ K.L. Zadykhina, “Etnograficheskie materialy o byte rabochikh-uzbekov Tashkenta i Andijana,” *Sredneaziatskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, t. 2 (Moscow: Iz-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), 115, 123.

⁸ G.P. Vasil'eva, “Otrazhenie etnosotsial'nykh protsessov v material'noi kul'ture sovremennoi sel'skoi sem'i (na primere narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 5 (May 1982): 41.

⁹ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

village) to the city of Bukhara in 1970, Shoiras Asadova said, they had aspired to “master the daily life of the city,” including “the modern way of setting the table” – that is, with European-style utensils and wine glasses – which was new and unfamiliar for “young rural people.”¹⁰ Ziyoda Usmanova (female, Uzbek, b. 1958) characterized the multi-ethnic, industrial city of Termez in southern Uzbekistan in terms of a spirit of aspirational modernization and urbanization, observing that people in the city during the 1960s “were striving to, how to put it, essentially, to inculcate in their children a more European way of life than a traditional one.”¹¹ The notion that late Soviet Central Asian society ought to be understood in terms of a continuum between two cultural poles, alternately construed as “Europeanized” and “traditionalist” or as “urban” and “rural,” represents a common thread that runs inescapably through these Central Asian narratives.

The frequency with which Central Asians, particularly members of the urban intelligentsia, described themselves as “Europeanized” represents an especially pointed example of how Soviet categories both permeated local society and were transformed in the process (Figure 5.2). The notion that “Europe” signified a repository of universal modernity accessible to members of all nationalities is traceable to Soviet discourses of internationalism. Yet within much of official Soviet rhetoric, Russian culture was presupposed to be the most immediate conduit through which the non-Russian Soviet peoples would gain access to universal European culture. My Central Asian informants, by contrast, tended to draw a sharp line between “Europeanization,” which was used as a term of positive self-identification, and “Russification,” which could be used as a term of derision. The problem with the term “Russification,” in part, is that it suggested a greater degree of Russian cultural and ethnic specificity to the newly arising identity and regime of consumption than was typically felt by those who adopted it. Compare this with other terms of self-identification used to describe the same cultural gulf -

¹⁰ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

¹¹ Ziyoda Usmanova, personal interview.



Figure 5.2. Portrait of a self-described “Europeanized” Kyrgyz family, 1981. Source: Salamat Beshimova [pseudonym], personal interview, 11 Aug. 2014.

“educated,” “intelligentsia,” “progressive,” “advanced,” “modern,” even “Europeanized” – which were assumed to transcend ethnicity. To the extent that self-identified “Europeanized” Central Asians diverged from the practices of their parents and grandparents or their co-ethnics in the rural countryside, they felt themselves to be entering into a community not (solely) of ethnic Russians, nor even (solely) of members of the Soviet elite or progressive citizenry across all republics, but of modern, literate, forward-thinking humanity in a broader sense. Nodira Mustofoeva, for example, drew a rigid distinction between “Russification,” which she conceptualized in terms of cultural loss, and “Europeanization,” which she conceptualized in terms of cultural broadening:

I went to camps a lot. Pioneer camps... This is why my [Russian] language has gotten to this level. Although, I'll tell you again, I grew up and studied in an Uzbek environment... I don't think in Russian. I think in Uzbek, but I speak in Russian. [Laughs.] But there are those strata [*sloi*] who both think and speak in Russian. Russified, we call them. My mother didn't allow us to Russify [*obrusit'*]. She gave us a *European* upbringing, but at the same time she held to - [pause] well, traditions. She fulfilled all the traditions [*ispolniala vse traditsii*]. I had, we all had, *atlas* dresses, all of us had them. But at the same time, she also forced us to move along with the

times [*khodit's so vremenem vmeste*].¹²

It is highly characteristic that Mustofoeva cites both national language— “thinking in Uzbek” – and national consumer goods – the possession of traditional-style dresses made from *atlas* silk – as bulwarks against the loss of cultural distinctiveness that might accompany the adoption of European habits and values. Consumption, as we shall see, could provide a way around the zero-sum quality of the Europeanization-traditionalism polarity, allowing Central Asians to identify as Europeanized while maintaining certain markers of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Also revealing is the qualification that her mother “forced us to move along with the times.” If on the one hand Mustofoeva differentiates her family from the theoretical category of “Russified” Uzbeks who had lost their native language as well as their “traditions,” she also takes care to distinguish herself from those who, according to the Soviet evolutionary historical framework, stood somehow chronologically behind modern life.

Yet even as many members of the Central Asian urban intelligentsia appear to have internalized elements of the Soviet state’s universalist and evolutionary ideology, the content attributed to Europeanness itself was creeping further afield from the ideal of Soviet respectability advocated in the official press and Soviet advice literature. Ravshan Nazarov (b. 1966, male, Uzbek), for example, described the standard form of dress in the public spaces of his Tashkent neighborhood as Europeanized. But it turns out that this label could encapsulate both the staid respectability of Soviet professional dress and the import-obsessed fashions of the youth. On the one hand, he said, “Perhaps the most prestigious appearance was like the uniform of a Moscow captain – a dark blue jacket with gold buttons. This appearance was considered very respectable [*solidno*], very prestigious. A white shirt, a dark tie.”¹³ The particulars of this image speak strongly to the model of male respectability, inflected with a certain nineteenth-century sensibility, that connoted European universalism in Soviet

¹² Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

¹³ Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview, 14 May 2014.

discourse: the trajectory to Central Asia by way of Moscow, the ideal of muted and reserved manliness, the traces of both bourgeois refinement and militarism. On the other hand, Nazarov also stated that Western European and American imports, particularly jeans and Adidas sneakers, carried their own kind of prestige in late Soviet Tashkent: “A person who wore that kind of clothing was considered a very elite person,” he said. At least among the Uzbek youth of the capital city, Nazarov suggests, the appeal of Europeanness lay as much with the contemporary youth culture of the West as with the variant of “European” high culture transmitted through Soviet institutions. In one sense, this slippage in local uses of “European” meant that Soviet ideology had lost some of its exclusive power to define the parameters of internationalism and modernity. At the same time, the ability of the term to refer simultaneously to a universalist high cultural ideal and to the alluring consumerist wonderland of the post-war West likely only increased its appeal as an idiom of self-identification and cultural allegiance, particularly among the younger generation of Central Asians in the late Soviet period.

While the category of “Europeanization” contained ready-made multitudes of meaning for Central Asians to draw on, it is perhaps more surprising that many also found (or invented) local and personal resonances in the starkly regulatory principles of Soviet consumption discourse – culturedness, taste, and hygiene. I was somewhat startled to discover that my respondents periodically wove these concepts into their self-narratives as well, and in a similarly taken-for-granted way. In the case of culturedness and hygiene – two concepts that were often deployed in the Soviet press to condemn Central Asian traditions and argue the superiority of European ways of life – their use could be double-edged. At times, my interviewees reproduced the cultural hierarchy implicit in these terms, utilizing them to critique certain “backward” traditional Central Asian practices and define their own modes of consumption favorably by contrast. Dinara Sultanbekova (female, Kyrgyz, b. 1941) stated that in her childhood home in Frunze during the 1950s, in accordance with the “urban [*gorodskii*]” way of life, her family had eaten their meals from a European-style table and chairs. This fact, she indicated, placed her

at the far end of a continuum that included rural Kyrgyz who ate while seated on the floor and those who ate from a low “national” table surrounded by cushions. She conceded that the latter practice was “somewhat more cultured than [sitting] on the floor [*nemnozhko kul’turno, chem na polu*],” though presumably not as cultured as eating from a European-style table as her family did.¹⁴ Nodira Mustofoeva invoked both the hierarchical and visceral functions of the Soviet Central Asian hygienic discourse to draw a sharp line between her urban intelligentsia family and the rural Uzbek population: “In qishloqs especially – to this day I feel this –there is some sort of specific smell. Because we [in the city] had cleanliness [*u nas byla chistota*], it seems. My mother made us bathe every two days, and every Sunday she made us clean the house and do the laundry.” Even someone who grew up in a small Kyrgyz village, like Aibek Ismailov (male, Kyrgyz, b. 1958), could cite his childhood home’s “white-washed walls and white, clean linens,” which he noted were rare in the countryside, as an indicator of his parent’s social standing and his father’s status as “an educated member of the intelligentsia [*obrazovannyi, intelligentnyi chelovek*].”¹⁵

Yet it was also possible for Central Asians to deploy these principles of cultured consumption in ways that challenged or even inverted the hierarchies laid down in the Soviet press. A counterpoint in informal discourse to the Soviet medical and scientific concept of hygiene, for example, posited that cleanliness was not a civilizing boon brought by European culture, but rather a particular virtue of Central Asian peoples, setting them apart even from the Russians.¹⁶ In describing her own consumer values and practices, Shoiras Asadova associated Central Asianness with cleanliness in a way that implicitly spoke back to the Soviet insinuation that Uzbek traditionalism was unhygienic by nature. Characterizing her family home in Bukhara in the 1970s, she uses a set of descriptors that correspond

¹⁴ Dinara Sultanbekova [pseudonym], personal interview, 21 Aug. 2014.

¹⁵ Aibek Ismailov [pseudonym], personal interview, 14 Aug. 2014.

¹⁶ David MacKenzie Abramson, “From Soviet to Mahalla: Community and Transition in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Indiana University, 1998), 139.

closely to the post-war Soviet ideal of cultured consumption: “Our life was, so to speak, advanced, comfortable, and always very clean [*prodvnutom, udobnom, i vseгда ochen’ chistom*],” she summarized. But instead of deploying the ideal of hygiene to emphasize her distinction from her co-ethnics, she presents it as a characteristic national trait: “Uzbek families in general devoted very great attention to cleanliness and hygiene.” Moreover, the particular consumption practices that she offered in support of this statement represented a blend of the “traditional” and the “European”: “We, for example, in daily life always sat on *ko’rpachas* around the *xontaxta* [low Uzbek table]. Naturally, with an oilcloth, a tablecloth laid on it. But at the same time, we also set out modern dishes, plates.”¹⁷ As with the concept of Europeaness, Central Asians might adopt and internalize certain pervasive values deriving from Soviet consumption discourse even while implicitly challenging or discarding the ethno-cultural hierarchies they buttressed in their official use.

To say that Central Asians’ engagement with state-derived frameworks and terminologies could generate such mildly subversive effects, though, is not to say that their approach was one of “resistance,” nor that they blithely instrumentalized official discourse and used it as they pleased. The mutability that these principles acquired in their application to the local context was offset by what was often a powerful taken-for-granted quality. Lest the above examples still be interpreted as evidence of a merely pragmatic or opportunistic level of Central Asian engagement with Soviet discourses, it is necessary to recognize that elements of such discourses often became closely woven into individuals’ sense of self and of their own place in society, and could become implicated in emotionally fraught and intensely personal experiences. About an hour into our interview, in the midst of a discussion of her move to Moscow in 1982, Ziyoda Usmanova paused to offer the following reflection on the reasons for her divorce from her first husband:

¹⁷ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

In principle, he wasn't traditional, my first husband. That wasn't the problem. It was just, how to put it – his way of life suited me, he was also quite democratic. The problem was with values [*tsennosti*]. That is, for me the main value was still in education, while for him the main value was in money. This was the fundamental cause that served our disagreement. I've never had a striving to live beautifully, richly, and so on. Yes, I provide for my daily life [*da, byt svoi ia nalazhivaiu*]. As a person, I want for my home to be clean, beautiful, to have technologies – in this respect, yes. But this is not the whole of my life. While for him, everything was making a career, becoming rich, building a large beautiful house – although he didn't build a beautiful one. Because he didn't have enough taste, because he didn't have enough education [*vkusa ne khvatilo, ne khvatilo obrazovaniia*].

Usmanova begins by reiterating her personal commitment to “democratic” relations within the family, defined in contrast to “traditional” Central Asian familial and gendered hierarchies. She had stated earlier that her parents, and her father in particular, were “very democratic,” in the sense that they allowed her to wear whatever clothing she chose without criticism or comment; she tellingly linked this to the fact that her father had attended university in Moscow. In this way, she infuses the Soviet values of both Europeanization and education with personal meaning, presenting them as a kind of escape route from the strictures of the traditional Central Asian family. Yet the fundamental issue in her relationship with her husband, she says, was not the divide between Europeanization and traditionalism, but an incompatibility between two different attitudes toward wealth and consumption. It is not necessary to argue that differing opinions about consumer “taste” in fact caused her divorce. What is revealing is that taste, education, and attitudes toward wealth act as the sticking points around which her narrativization of this (somewhat painful) memory revolves.

It is noteworthy, first, that Usmanova positions the concept of consumer “taste” as such a key component of her own intelligentsia identity and personal scale of values, and second, that “taste” in her definition is explicitly contrasted with what is essentially, in the terminology of the post-war Soviet press, “philistinism.” Asked to expand on what she meant by taste, she added: “Taste does not mean ‘expensive,’ it means beautiful and convenient.” The principles she cites here and in the above quote – convenience, cleanliness, minimalistic beauty, restraint – closely correlate with the guidance offered to consumers in the post-war Soviet press. Compare, for example, the advice printed in the Uzbek-

language women's journal *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* in 1959 on how to be a "cultured" consumer:

"Boastfulness, and especially boasting with possessions and wealth, is one of the clearest indications not of culturedness, but of unculturedness... Good clothing means clothing that is the most convenient and beneficial for a person's health, that augments a person's beauty, and that does not offend the aesthetic sense of others."¹⁸ Usmanova depicted her own approach to consumption, which she associated with tastefulness, as a counterpoint to both academic theories of conspicuous consumption and the consumer practices of her former husband: "If I buy a microwave, this is not buying an indicator of my wealth. I buy it because it's so convenient for me. If I buy a big television, it's not because I want to show that I'm rich, but because on the big screen I can see well. [Laughs.] You understand? With me, there's never been a pursuit of expensive things [*u menia ne bylo nikogda pogoni za dorogimi veshchami*]." On one level, this statement serves as a defensive justification of her consumption habits; the laughter seems to indicate slight discomfort as much as anything else, perhaps indicating an awareness of her vulnerability to accusations of luxury. Nevertheless, she frames her difference from others within Soviet (and contemporary) Central Asian society, who presumably strove to advertise their wealth and status through the consumption of "expensive things," as a core element of her identity as a certain (educated, intelligentsia, cultured, tasteful) type of consumer.

With this narrative about her past, Ziyoda Usmanova establishes a particular image of herself and her place within Central Asian society, avowing an identity as a member of the modernized, cultured Central Asian intelligentsia, demonstrated by her primary value on education and her alienation from the consumerism and materialism of (less-educated) careerists and lovers of luxury. While the linking of an intelligentsia identity to anti-consumerist sentiment is by no means unique to the Soviet or Central Asian contexts, it is unmistakably inflected in this case by little Sovietisms that suggest its roots in the discourses of the 1950s-1970s: the moral distaste for wealth and "careerism," the divide between

¹⁸ Izzat Sulton, "Madaniy kishi," *O'zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 9 (Sep. 1959): 18.

correct and incorrect modes of consumption not on the basis of particular objects (the microwave, the large-screen television) but on the basis of mentalities in relation to those objects (conspicuous consumption versus “convenience”), the conviction that true “taste” and beauty in home décor could only be achieved by an educated person. Yet tracing the apparent genealogy of this language of self-description and social differentiation is not intended to trivialize it or question its sincerity. Usmanova was, by all appearances, not delivering a prepared or premeditated statement so much as she was, in the context of our interview, grasping for a coherent narrative to explain this episode from her past; in doing so, she evidently found the discursive contrasts between education and wealth, taste and conspicuous consumption to be of use. What this suggests, in combination with the above examples, is not only the ubiquity and pervasiveness that the consumption discourses described in Chapters 3 and 4 had achieved in Central Asian life, but also the intimate meanings that these dominant rhetorics acquired as individuals applied them to their lived experiences.

Social dimensions of consumption: Aspiration, pride, embarrassment, and shame

If attitudes toward consumption could become woven into individual self-definitions, Usmanova’s assessment of her former husband’s taste suggests that they also played powerfully into how individuals were perceived (and judged) by others. Many anthropological and historical studies of consumption have grappled with the question of whether consumer cultures should be understood primarily in terms of constraint and compulsion or in terms of agency and self-actualization. In their most extreme form, these debates may present the consumer alternately as a “dupe” or a “creative actor,” and the goods they desire as either “manipulative” or “emancipatory.”¹⁹ Although these categories doubtless present a false binary, they nevertheless capture something of the double-edged

¹⁹ Victoria De Grazia, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 279.

nature of consumption, particularly in the morally charged and culturally divided world of late Soviet Central Asia. For our purposes, the most interesting tension is that between consumption as a sphere of individual choice and relatively free-wheeling self-fashioning, and consumption as a sphere of acrimonious social contestation, judgement, and feelings of duress. As is often the case in situations of cross-cultural transmission, the availability of both local-style and European-style goods opened up new possibilities for consumer self-expression and selective affiliation while simultaneously ratcheting up the political and cultural stakes of consuming in particular ways.²⁰ In this context, the burgeoning availability of goods and expanding horizons of consumer choice could indeed be experienced as a kind of joy or even liberation, allowing the creative, experimental, or aspirational exploration of different kinds of selves. But it was also a minefield of potential minor hurts and humiliations, in which certain choices could be penalized, and others pressured or even compelled in particular social contexts. In my interviews with Central Asian consumers, there was often a sharp divide between consumption choices that they narrated in terms of self-expression and personal fulfillment and those they described in terms of external obligation or compulsion, and neither experience can be dismissed as false or irrelevant. Yet as significant as the divide between creative self-fashioning and community constraint may be from the subjective perspective of the consumer, equally in both cases, choice was embedded in a social context which shaped it and gave it meaning, which linked it to the establishment and maintenance of social relationships and subjected it to social consequences.

Ziyoda Usmanova felt acutely both the expanding possibilities and social hazards of consumption when she moved from the comparatively Europeanized city of Termez to the more traditionalist Namangan in 1970, at the age of twelve. "When I came to Namangan, everything was very

²⁰ For examples of this phenomenon outside the context of Soviet Central Asia, see Laura R. Oswald, "Culture Swapping: Consumption and the Ethnogenesis of Middle-Class Haitian Immigrants," *Journal of Consumer Research* 25/4 (March 1999): 303-318; Aliakbar Jafari, "Two Tales of a City: An Exploratory Study of Cultural Consumption among Iranian Youth," *Iranian Studies* 40/3 (June 2007): 367-383; Thomas Burgess, "Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles over youth and citizenship in revolutionary Zanzibar," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35/2-3 (2002): 287-313.

strange for me, of course,” she recalled. Growing up in the “polyethnic” Termez, she had little exposure to Central Asian-style clothing: “We dressed the way that everyone dressed,” she said simply, which is to say in European style. Her arrival in Namangan thus marked her first encounter with “traditional families – that is, Uzbeks who preserved customs and rites,” and her first realization that “at home [some] girls wear national clothing, that at home they wear headscarves.” Initially, her reaction was a sort of fascination with the novelty of Uzbek national clothing, seeded by exposure through her female classmates: “At first, I was interested... I asked my mother to sew me national dresses, national *lozim* [traditional-style pants]... For a while, it was interesting, I was glad to do it [*ia radovalas'*].” She presents herself as taking the initiative in this situation, eagerly pursuing the opportunity to explore the expressive possibilities of national clothing in the way that a curious teenager might, even as she responded to the influences and cues of her social environment. But she quickly found that the choice of clothing in Namangan was not merely a matter of personal preference, but also of social expectation and compulsion, which she encapsulated in the English phrase “you must”: “When they say to you ‘you must,’ then the spirit of contrarianism appears... When they began to say – the environment [*okruzhenie*] and my girlfriends – that we *must* do this, I did not want to do it.” Asked how this feeling of compulsion manifested itself, she replied with the following anecdote:

For example, I went to the bazaar to buy tomatoes. And my dress was sleeveless, that is, I was wearing an apron dress [*sarafan*]. And the elderly man who was selling tomatoes said, “I won’t sell you these tomatoes.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You need to wear a dress with sleeves, you can’t dress like this. You’re an Uzbek girl, after all [*ty zhe uzbechka*].” And I said, “Well, so what if I’m an Uzbek, why do I have to dress the way you dress?”... This really hurt me a great deal [*menia eto ochen' sil'no zadelo*].²¹

Usmanova conveyed a sense of both surprise and offense at this encounter, which starkly communicated to her as a young woman that her manner of dress was subject to strangers’ gazes and

²¹ Ziyoda Usmanova, personal interview.

unintended imputations of meaning. It also marked her as an outsider to Namangan's social and cultural norms and produced a feeling of alienation toward this "traditionalist" milieu. Her brief dialogue with the elderly man seamlessly linked her style of dress, implied to be immodest, to the question of her ethnic belonging and finally to her ability to be credited as a member of the community, which the man answered in the negative with the minor act of ostracism denoted in his refusal to sell her tomatoes. As we shall see, this kind of social surveillance and pressure did not only fall on those who were too "modern" or European in their dress; those whose consumption choices were "too national," like Shoiras Asadova's cousin, could also be socially penalized within certain contexts, even among other ethnic Central Asians. In addition to their potential use in projects of self-fashioning and pursuit of consumerist pleasures, many types of goods were overburdened with moral and social significance in the late Soviet Central Asian context, and a single article of clothing could be densely laden with connotations relating to gender, sexual morality, and ethnic and cultural allegiances.

In this sense, consumption and consumer choice were not so much "individual" in any kind of politically or sociologically specific meaning of the term as they were, in a great many cases, intensely *personal* in ways that did not negate but in fact relied on their position within a web of social interaction, expectation, and compulsion. They were closely tied up with affect, with human relationships of various kinds, with idiosyncratic preferences as well as with the deeply-felt pressures for conformity from the social milieu. They were also, especially within the morally charged discourse of the post-war Soviet period, points of personal vulnerability. The criticism and stigmatization of "improper" consumption behaviors, both within the official Soviet press and within daily interactions in Central Asia, could be remarkably merciless, relying on the public calling out and shaming of individual violations of propriety, good taste, or hygiene, and moreover often reading into those violations fundamental defects of the individual's character or mentality. In the local moral discourse of the era, consumer choice was understood as a question of individual conduct, a reflection of individual desires

and values, in which family, community, and society at large were nevertheless assumed to have a stake, a vested interest, and a right to intervene.

Indeed, the treatment of consumer choice (particularly in the realm of dress) as a form of *moral* choice, possessing the capacity to inflict social harm and therefore justifying and even demanding community intervention, is a salient feature of Soviet Central Asian consumption discourses during the post-war decades. Though belonging to the genre of satirical fiction, the short story “A funeral at a wedding party” (*To’yda aza*), written by prominent Soviet Uzbek writer Abdulla Qahhor in 1956, supplies some of the flavor of post-war life in Uzbekistan while presenting the mahalla community as the (rightful) enforcer of a particular morality of dress and behavior. Like the satires targeting *stiliagi* youth and immodestly dressed women described in Chapter 4, the story appeals to a shared community stake in individual consumption choices in a way that seamlessly integrates Soviet-derived and locally particularistic moral sensibilities. The story revolves around the character of an elderly, white-bearded teacher named Muxtorxon Mansurov, initially revered by the residents of the mahalla and referred to by the respectful title “*domla*” (master, professor). Yet significantly, the story is not told from this character’s perspective. All important events in the narrative are relayed second-hand, via rumors and scandalized conversations among other members of the mahalla about Muxtorxon domla’s activities. Tellingly, the author does not use this narrative device in order to deliver a cautionary tale about the destructive power of gossip; rather, the perspective of the (mostly unnamed) mahalla observers serves as a kind of moral center for the tale. Muxtorxon domla gradually loses the respect of his neighbors through a series of outrageous changes to his personal appearance – he adopts something like the officially disparaged *stiliagi* style, evidently in an effort to reassert his youth – and when he finally is so discredited among his community that almost no one attends his funeral, this is presented as the inevitable and perhaps even deserved consequence of his actions.

The ostensible social harms caused by Muxtorxon domla's unconventional consumption choices – the discomfort, regret, anger, and offense those choices generated among his neighbors and acquaintances – occupy center stage in the narrative. When an acquaintance at the local *choyxona* reports that the domla had shaved his long white beard, the other tea-drinkers express feelings of “pity and sadness,” presuming that he must have acted out of a kind of temporary madness: “Some idea came into our domla’s head to shave his beard, and now he can’t face us out of shame and regret.” When another member of the mahalla later spots him drinking beer and vodka in a public park, “wearing short wide pants and a checkered shirt, his sleeves rolled up high and an enormous gold watch on his wrist,” “people’s breath caught in their throats,” and “disgusting thoughts, not at all corresponding with the domla’s reputation, came into some people’s minds.” The final blow, however, comes when the widowed, elderly domla’s new bride visits the mahalla to order her wedding dress from a local shop. She is, it turns out, much younger than the people of the mahalla had expected, a university student of about twenty. But far from being seen as a victim, she bears the brunt of the community’s indignation, and is mercilessly harassed for her outlandish and insufficiently modest clothing:

The bride was, it is true, young, but as fat and round as could be [*xuddi qiziqchilikka semirganday yum-yumaloq*]. She was wearing a sleeveless red dress and, on her head, a red hat that looked like the crest of a bird. The purse in her hands and the high-heeled shoes on her feet were also red. As she was stepping out of the studio, one of the women, who were looking her over from head to foot with hostility and disgust [*adovat va nafrat bilan*], said: “Better to die than look like a lollipop! [lit. candy rooster, *Xo’rozqandga o’xshamay o’l*]!” Another woman added, “Better for the domla to die too than lick a lollipop in his old age!”²²

On the one hand, the styles of dress that the domla and his young bride adopted and that aroused such indignation in the mahalla community were the typical low-hanging fruit of post-war Soviet Central Asian satires – the garish *stiliagi* fashions that could simultaneously be stigmatized as philistine and socially irresponsible in Soviet rhetoric and as immodest and disrespectful from the standpoint of

²² Abdulla Qahhor, “To’yda aza,” <www.ziyouz.com>, accessed 22 Jul. 2016.

Central Asian traditionalism.²³ On the other hand, the vehemence of the mahalla women's response to the young bride's manner of dress is startling; even more so, perhaps, is the author's apparent endorsement of their anger. Though hardly known as a traditionalist writer, Abdulla Qahhor offers no reproach for this case of mahalla self-policing and street harassment – a fact which is striking given that just a few decades earlier, these same community policing mechanisms had been enlisted in opposition to the Soviet unveiling of Uzbek women.²⁴ If anything, Qahhor seems to validate the notion that the young woman had herself inflicted a kind of collective harm through her manner of dress, explaining, "Both those who had seen and those who had not seen this woman hated her with an anger that could pierce through stone. With a single stroke, she had robbed the mahalla of its warmth and extinguished the light that had always shone in people's hearts. This anger began to eat away at the feeling of respect and love for the domla in people's hearts." When the domla dies suddenly of overexertion a month after his wedding, the social death brought about by his and his bride's alienating dress and behavior is made literal. The final lines of the story leave little doubt that the moral lesson pertains not to the behavior of the mahalla community, but to that of the misguided domla: "Not many people from the mahalla came to the funeral. Apparently, in many people's hearts the domla had died a month earlier, and many had considered his wedding party to be his funeral."²⁵ The satirical targets of the story remain the old man's novelty-seeking folly and the degenerative effects of youth culture rather than the conservative social norms and self-regulatory practices of the mahalla.

To be sure, the role of sociability in consumer decision-making was not solely a negative or constraining one. The social dimension of consumption also included the potential for building

²³ See Chapter 4.

²⁴ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 174-175; Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 187.

²⁵ Abdulla Qahhor, "To'yda aza," <www.ziyouz.com>, accessed 22 Jul. 2016.

interpersonal connections and experiencing feelings of pleasure, pride, and mutual admiration. Fashion was often explicitly experienced, especially by young urban Central Asians, as a sphere for the exploration and expression of styles that signified both a particular sense of self and the belonging in a particular community of style-seeking youth consumers (Figure 5.3). While none of my respondents self-identified using the term *stiliagi*, many of them described the appeal of fashions that would have likely earned them the disapprobation both of authoritative Soviet discourses and of traditionalist Central Asian social milieus under that label. Evidently, the scathing critiques *stiliagi* styles of dress received in the local-language Soviet press were not enough to outweigh their individual and communal pleasures. Ziyoda Usmanova, for instance, recounts wearing a sweater imported from the West that she had purchased illicitly from a Polish black market seller (Russ. *fartsovshchik*) in 1980: “It symbolized America, because there was an image of stars and stripes in the colors of the American flag on this sweater.” She did not elaborate on the specific meaning of this symbolism, but instead recalled the sensation of being unique and exceptional that she experienced while wearing it: “I remember I wore this sweater with jeans, let my hair down, and felt like I was the most fashionable person in the city.” Such unconventional and Western-looking fashions seem to have provided Central Asian youth with an independent scale of prestige on which they could occupy a more highly valued place, if only among other urban youths, than they could in conventional late Soviet society. Yurchak has described the way that Western artifacts represented an opportunity for ingenuity and community-building in the Russian context, where “their immense appeal to Soviet youth was in their promise of personal creativity and the possibility of creating a vibrant and shared world.”²⁶ Ravshan Nazarov recalled that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, young men at his school who broke convention and dressed in eccentric ways, particularly making use of imported products—a bright red coat, or jeans and a denim jacket—acquired

²⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 197.

an aura of stylishness and daring among their classmates: “The older generation would usually condemn him, but the younger generation might even admire him... In general, any behavior that went outside the bounds of the customary, the generally accepted behavior, was always perceived by the younger generation as a kind of defiance [vyzov].” Laughing, he added, “Such people were considered almost revolutionaries.” While young people were typically marginalized both within the nostalgic, World War II-centric discourse of the late Soviet era and within the generational hierarchy of the Central Asian family, *stiliagi* fashions provided an alternative community within which they possessed centrality and status.



Figure 5.3. Uzbek youth fashions in Tashkent, 1986. Source: Shoiri Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.

Urban youth consumption facilitated a sense of community in more direct and material ways as well. Perhaps to an even greater extent than in Soviet Russia, in Central Asia access to desired goods from the West (often by means of the black market or grey market) was bottlenecked through the small number of locals who had the connections or foreign travel privileges necessary to obtain them. On the one hand, this enhanced the importance of social networks and friendships as channels for access to consumer goods.²⁷ On the other hand, it turned the act of exchanging these goods into a social occasion and an opportunity for bonding in itself. One of Ziyoda Usmanova's classmates at Tashkent State University would periodically visit his brother studying in Leningrad and return to Uzbekistan with a haul of jeans and records by Western pop groups like Boney M, Smokie, and Abba. Usmanova described the shared illicit delight that his arrival would generate among her group of friends: "He would bring a bag, and my girlfriends and I would open this bag at my house and see what was interesting in there, and each of us would buy something."²⁸ As university students in Przhelval'sk, Kyrgyzstan in the early 1970s, Bermet Kadyrova (female, Kyrgyz, b. 1953) and her classmates formed a social circle in which records of pop music or jazz obtained from abroad served a similar community-building function: because such records were in limited availability, "if someone managed to get one, the whole class would go listen to it," and all of the young men and women would sing along together, she recalled. She and her girlfriends also kept notebooks where they collected tokens of the global consumer cultures beyond the borders of the USSR – song lyrics, names of American and Indian performers, pictures cut out of foreign magazines portraying beautiful women or the actors playing James Bond.²⁹ When her classmates' parents brought back a fashion magazine or a catalog from abroad, Go'zal Pasilova (b. 1968, female,

²⁷ On the operations of informal relationships in obtaining consumer goods in the Russian context, see Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁸ Ziyoda Usmanova, personal interview.

²⁹ Bermet Kadyrova [pseudonym], personal interview, 20 Aug. 2014.

Uzbek) recalls, “We would each take turns taking it home for one day”; when a parent returned from a trip with a haul of new goods, “We would say, ‘What has she brought back? What has she brought for you?’... We looked at everything and talked about it, asked about it.”³⁰ Consumption could thus serve as a basis for communal relations both through the symbolism of shared stylistic choices and through the pursuit of consumption as a social activity, and particular consumer preferences could be shaped and reinforced through the positive feedback of these social ties.

Even where they roughly coincided with consumer practices in the Russian part of the Soviet Union, then, Central Asian experiences of consumption – of Soviet trade, of *blat*, of the pursuit of prestigious imported goods, of buying from speculators and resellers – supported and helped constitute a locally specific, distinctively Central Asian late Soviet social and cultural order. Access to rare foreign-made products, on the one hand, signaled the elite status within the Soviet system that allowed for connections abroad; but within Central Asia itself, the possession and display of these kinds of goods, or the ability to gift or (illicitly) resell them to others, could translate into a more locally inflected sort of status and prestige for the purchaser and his or her family. As we have seen in the case of the *stiliagi* youth, goods originating from abroad could become a tool and a medium for the development of local relationships and forms of sociability. But Central Asian consumers could garner an even more locally distinctive form of social capital through the practices of gift-giving surrounding Central Asian life-cycle celebrations (Uzb. *to’y*, Kyrg. *toi*), such as circumcision and wedding celebrations. The growing phenomenon of the “extravagant *to’y*” was the subject of a great deal of hand-wringing in the Soviet Central Asian press of the post-war era, framed in didactic articles as a specifically Central Asian strain of the rampant consumerism that threatened the post-war USSR.³¹ But these accounts neglected both the social utility of extravagant gift-giving and the extent to which it drew on the prestige of goods obtained

³⁰ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

³¹ See Chapter 3.

through elite Soviet connections and travel both within and beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Foods purchased from the “abundance [*izobilie*]” of Moscow’s department stores in the 1980s (jars of olives, caviar, chocolate, bananas), foreign cosmetics, Japanese tape recorders and video cameras all became prestigious and highly valued items of Central Asian gift exchange in the late Soviet period.³² According to Koroteyeva and Makarova, the “rotating associations” (*gap* or *gashtak*) that had been a prominent pre-Soviet form of male leisure and sociability in Uzbekistan were reinvented as male or female networks of friends, school mates, and co-workers who took part in “a reciprocal exchange of prestigious consumer goods” – including both difficult-to-obtain modern household appliances and national goods – “in addition to continuing the traditional function of sociability.”³³ Nodira Mustofoeva even recalled that one of her distant relatives “took part in speculation,” traveling by train to Moscow to buy curtains made from some desirable material, then bringing them back to Uzbekistan and cutting them into the lengths of cloth traditionally given with the Uzbek dowry.³⁴

Nonetheless, feelings of constraint and the fear of social repercussions were omnipresent forces shaping consumer decision-making in late Soviet Central Asia. The frequency with which my respondents described their experiences in terms of actual or anticipated “shame,” “embarrassment,” or “condemnation” from others sheds light on the importance of social surveillance and informal regulation in shaping the local consumer landscape. Go’zal Pasilova noted that she had always enjoyed wearing Uzbek *atlas* dresses and a *do’ppi* with her hair done up in small braids as a child. When she reached a certain age, however – “seven, eight, or nine years old” – she became “embarrassed” to dress that way in Tashkent. It was only when she visited her family’s relatives in Kokand, where national dress was more common, that she could dress that way “without inhibitions [*bez kompleksov*].” “On the

³² Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview.

³³ Koroteyeva and Makarova, “Money and Social Connections,” 587.

³⁴ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

contrary,” she said, “there we asked, ‘Give us our Uzbek dresses, national dresses’... There we loved to wear them. Nobody would condemn you.”³⁵ Such condemnation could arise in the opposite direction as well; in Kyrgyzstan, outside of the capital city, dressing in mini-skirts or in the manner of a “style-hippie” (*stil'-khippi*), in the words of Chynara Osmonova (b. 1968, female, Kyrgyz), was likely to elicit disapproving remarks, especially from members of the older generation.³⁶ Tellingly, this same terminology of embarrassment and social judgement was also commonly used to describe an experience unrelated to consumption but sharing similar ethnic and cultural baggage – insufficient mastery of the Russian language. Aibek Ismailov lived in the village of Ak-Zhar until the age of seventeen, and he described feeling intensely anxious when he moved to the city of Osh in 1975. Not only was it difficult to get by in the city without knowing Russian, it was even looked upon as “shameful [*styдно*],” and he said he felt “embarrassed” by his lack of fluency.³⁷ Go’zal Pasilova went so far as to say that speaking Uzbek at all was regarded as socially uncomfortable in some of the heavily Russian-populated public spaces of the capital city of Tashkent: “People were embarrassed – on public transport, or in some places among a large group of people – [and] many Uzbeks tried to speak Russian even among themselves.”³⁸ If this paints a rather startling picture of the degree to which Europeanizing norms had acquired dominance in the urban centers of post-war Central Asia, it also suggests that pressures toward Europeanization had grown to be immanent in the Central Asian social sphere by the post-war period, rather than being solely or even predominantly imposed from above.

Equally for “Europeanizing” and “traditionalist” norms by the post-war period, then, incentivization and enforcement were predominantly *social* processes. As powerful as the operation of

³⁵ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

³⁶ Chynara Osmonova [pseudonym], personal interview, 14 Aug. 2014; Bermet Kadyrova, personal interview.

³⁷ Aibek Ismailov, personal interview.

³⁸ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

these norms could be, they were largely enacted by means of mutual surveillance, pressure, harassment, and ostracism, or in a more positive sense by means of encouragement, a sense of social belonging, and individuals' own deliberate conformity with the habits of their peers.³⁹ Even in the case of the school uniform, where the Soviet state explicitly threw its weight behind European-style dress for school-age Central Asian children, the enforcement of a standard that excluded any national markers does not appear to have been universal, but instead rested on local decision-makers. A number of oral history respondents, it is true, recall a prohibition on national headwear, hairstyles, or other ethnically distinctive markers as part of the school uniform. Kokul Chekirova (b. 1959, female, Kyrgyz) stated that in her school in a rural village in Issyk-Kul oblast, the school uniform was strictly enforced, and no additions were permitted beyond the red handkerchief indicating membership in the Young Pioneers.⁴⁰ Ravshan Nazarov noted that in his Russian-language Tashkent school, which was shared between the mostly Uzbek residents of the Akademgorodok district and Russians, Ukrainians, and other "Europeans" from a neighboring factory district, the wearing of an Uzbek *do'ppi* as part of the school uniform "was not accepted," though the line between social expectation and official prohibition here is unclear.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Nazarov said that he knew from photographs that many schoolchildren wore the *do'ppi* "in the regions, especially in national schools, in Uzbek[-language] schools." Indeed, photographs printed in the Uzbek women's journal *Saodat* in 1966 show young girls wearing the female variant of the *do'ppi* with their school uniforms, and a 1972 photograph of Shoiras Asadova's class in Bukhara depicts several boys wearing the *do'ppi* there as well (Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5).⁴² By 1984, *Saodat's* editors even

³⁹ This was in contrast both to the potential for state coercion and to the threats and acts of violence that accompanied the local reaction to women's unveiling in the 1920s. See Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; and Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.

⁴⁰ Kokul Chekirova, personal interview, 20 Aug. 2014.

⁴¹ Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview.

⁴² *Saodat* no. 7 (Jul. 1966).



Figure 5.4. National headwear in a classroom in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 1972. Source: Shoira Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.



Figure 5.5. Kyrgyz national headwear worn alongside the Soviet Young Pioneer scarf, from an illustration to the story “Zhalgyzdyk zhana zhalaa” by Sh. Beishenaliev. Source: Image by E. Sushkov, *Zhash Lenichi* no. 9 (Sep. 1954): 9.

went so far as to speak out against schools that prohibited the Uzbek style of plaiting the hair into dozens of small braids, indicating both that the stigmatization of markers of ethnic and national difference in schools continued to be widespread, and that it was more a result of local decision-making than of a blanket Soviet policy. “Many letters to the editors from schoolchildren say that pupils are not permitted to come to school with their hair in small braids,” the article stated. “This is incorrect. There is no such directive.”⁴³ To be sure, the preferential treatment accorded to Europeanized dress within certain Central Asian schools and workplaces almost certainly drew on Soviet discourses of modernity and the implicitly privileged position of Russian and “modern” culture within the USSR. Nevertheless, to attribute Europeanizing pressures solely to “the state” would miss the instrumental role of social dynamics, often enough enacted by Central Asians with minimal or no official ties, in both elaborating and enforcing Europeanization in these milieus.

Fashion as code-switching: Consumption in “urban” and “rural” Central Asian publics

Thus far, the divergence in Soviet Central Asian society between Europeanization and traditionalism, or between condemnation of excessively “national” or traditional dress and condemnation of excessively modern, Western, or immodest dress, has been described largely in generalized and rhetorical terms. As many of the above examples have already suggested, however, this was not merely a free-floating set of cultural disputes in post-war Central Asia, but mapped onto the geography of the region in very specific ways. We have already witnessed some cases in which mobility across space required Central Asians to re-evaluate norms of appropriate dress: the palpable shift in expectations Ziyoda Usmanova experienced when moving from “Europeanized” Termez to “traditionalist” Andijan; the “embarrassment” Go’zal Pasilova reported wearing an Uzbek-style *do’ppi* and *atlas* dress in Tashkent, compared to the ability to wear the same “without inhibitions” in Kokand;

⁴³ “Soch ham husn,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1984): 30.

Shoira Asadova's commentary on her cousin's inappropriate choice of dress as a young woman of "rural" origin studying at an institute in Tashkent. The most common shorthand my respondents used to describe this cultural and geographic divide in Central Asian society was as a distinction between "urban" and "rural" ways of life, with "the city" signifying a greater degree of modernization and Europeanization and "the village" suggesting more traditionalist attitudes and a greater consumption of national-style goods. The urban-rural binary was a mainstay of Soviet statistical and ethnographic studies of Central Asia, generalizing from a model founded in the experiences of the early Soviet era in Russia. In official usage, the preferential use of the terms urban-rural to encapsulate the most important Central Asian cultural divide simultaneously implied a Marxist-Leninist evolutionary framework that marked the "rural" as chronologically lagging behind the "urban" and obfuscated the particularly ethnic and cultural dimension of the problem of differential consumption in the Central Asian case.⁴⁴

Yet it was not only in official sources, but also among my Central Asian informants that the terms "urban" and "modern," and likewise "rural" and "traditionalist," were used interchangeably. When visiting relatives in a village in the early 1970s, Shoira Asadova explained, "my grandmother and aunts dressed me in more rural clothing [*bole sel'skuiu odezhdu*]," which included traditional-style Uzbek *lozim* (long, loose-fitting pants cinched at the ankle) under a knee-length dress. "I didn't accept this," she said, "but they didn't accept it, either, when my brother wore shorts, or when I wore more urban, elegant clothes."⁴⁵ City dwellers had access to more varied and "fashionable" clothing, another

⁴⁴ In a particularly frustrating example, budget studies conducted in the 1960s by the Central Statistical Administrations in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz SSRs, as well as consumer demand studies conducted by republican institutions in the 1970s, routinely categorized the population according to the categories "urban" and "rural" or "workers" and "kolkhozniks," while official consumer studies from this period rarely if ever used nationality as a statistical category, despite the fact that nationality was regularly used for other kinds of demographic statistics. For examples, see TsGA KR F. 105, Op. 32, d. 2788; TsGA KR F. 105, Op. 32, d. 2792; TsGA KR F. 105, Op. 32, d. 3041; TsGA KR F. 105, Op. 33, d. 3954; TsGA KR F. 1576, Op. 1N, d. 22; TsGA RUz F. 1619, Op. 4, d. 3913; TsGA RUz F. 1619, Op. 4, d. 4254; TsGA RUz F. 2750, Op. 1N, d. 19.

⁴⁵ Shoira Asadova, personal interview.

respondent agreed, while in villages women wore “covered up, modest, long dresses.”⁴⁶ These terms are significant for the way that they entangled geography, class, and ethnicity, as will be explored in greater detail below. Nevertheless, the terms “urban” and “rural” are inadequate as a means of actually mapping divergences in consumption norms, and the cultural polarity they suggest, onto the Central Asian landscape. There does indeed seem to have been a geographic dimension to how differences in cultural affiliation, moral expectation, and consumer practice were distributed across Central Asian space, but it is more complex than a distinction between the cities and the countryside. Instead, “publics” governed by different norms could coexist even within a single city – in an Andijan public school as opposed to an Andijan bazaar, or in Tashkent’s central Labzak district as opposed to its Sharq Yulduzi mahalla.

In this context, “Europeanization” and “traditionalism” did not only represent distinct consumption practices or self-identifications, but also parallel and differentiated *normative systems* that were enacted and enforced within particular Central Asian spaces. Normative requirements of dress and self-presentation were being formulated simultaneously, and often incompatibly, on the basis of two distinct ethical and aesthetic foundations –the “urban” world in which European modes of dress were expected as a prerequisite of culturedness and modernity, and the normative influences of family, village, or mahalla, which harshly stigmatized female immodesty and in which certain “national” markers were the norm. In many ways, this situation resembles the experience of immigrant communities or ethnic minority subcultures within dominant cultures more generally; as John R. Hall explains, what results is not “a holistic and objective field of social distinctions” as Bourdieu posits, but rather “heterologous ‘markets’ and ‘currencies’ of cultural capital” which “interfigure with one another

⁴⁶ Chynara Osmonova, personal interview.

in ways that do not reduce to a single calculus of distinction.”⁴⁷ To be clear, most of my interview respondents expressed a strong personal preference for one or the other style of dress, likely conditioned by their upbringing and innumerable other factors of individual experience. Nevertheless, especially by the post-war period, it seems to have been rare that an individual was able to live out his or her life completely within the bounds of either an “urban” or “rural,” “Europeanized” or “traditionalist” style. Rather, traversing routinely – which is not to say painlessly – across these boundaries was the rule. Of course, consumers everywhere to some extent face contextual differences in the requirements of appropriate dress. Yet the fact that Central Asians, and especially Central Asian women, frequently faced situational demands on their dress that were mutually incompatible – what was obligatory (and not merely normal) in a collective farming village might be harshly stigmatized (and not merely unusual) in the capital, and vice-versa – meant that the existence of these parallel public spheres was especially sharply felt, and that navigation among them and adaptation to their requirements was both particularly necessary and particularly difficult.

If moving across space – between Central Asian regions, between neighborhoods in a single city, even between differing neighborhood publics like a school and a bazaar or a workplace and a teahouse – meant encountering drastically different norms of dress, many Central Asians seem to have accepted the obvious solution: taking up or shedding sartorial markers of Europeanness or traditionalism in accordance with the requirements of the most immediate social context. Changing clothes served as a kind of “code-switching” by which individuals could speak to, or in terms of, the values and social categories of each context in turn. When young people moved away from a traditionalist village to attend university in a major cosmopolitan city like Tashkent or Frunze, they often took up the fashions of their urban peers. Young women from the countryside who attended university in Tashkent,

⁴⁷ John R. Hall, “The Capital(s) of Cultures: A Nonholistic Approach to Status Situations, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity,” *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 260.

according to a 1966 ethnography, “gladly wear dresses of the modern style – narrow, clinging to the figure, with an open neckline and short sleeves.” Yet this transition was not necessarily permanent or unconditional. When they returned home to visit their families on the collective farms, “they all change into national dresses, because here the old traditions are held quite firmly and any innovations in clothing, especially women’s clothing, are greeted quite negatively by the older generation.”⁴⁸ This need to move between systems was even the subject of a 1981 Uzbek satirical cartoon, which shows university students dressed in modern fashions but standing behind a traditionally styled cardboard cutout in order to have pictures taken to send to their parents in the village (Figure 5.6). Bermet Kadyrova described wearing slacks for the first time during her first year as a university student in Przheval’sk, one of Kyrgyzstan’s largest cities. When she attempted to continue wearing slacks during a visit to her parents’ smaller (though by no means totally traditionalist) hometown, her father became very upset and threatened that if she wore them again, he would refuse to acknowledge her. She quickly learned to change into long dresses when leaving Przheval’sk in order to avoid the older generation’s condemnation.⁴⁹ Conversely, individuals who wore national clothing within the home or for family occasions typically felt obliged to dress in a standard European style in the professional settings of the university or workplace. According to a 1959 ethnography of urban Uzbek workers of Tashkent and Andijan, “Some workers come to the factory in a [national-style] robe [Uzb. *chopon*] but, arriving in the workshop, take it off. The robe is still widespread among workers as comfortable household clothing.”⁵⁰ This type of code-switching in the realm of fashion hints at the social weight and everyday reality that the discursive categories of “Europeanizing” and “traditionalist” consumption

⁴⁸ Zhilina 135.

⁴⁹ Bermet Kadyrova, personal interview.

⁵⁰ K.L. Zadykhina, “Etnograficheskie materialy o byte rabochikh-uzbekov Tashkenta i Andijana,” *Sredneaziatskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, t. 2 (Moscow: Iz-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), 124.

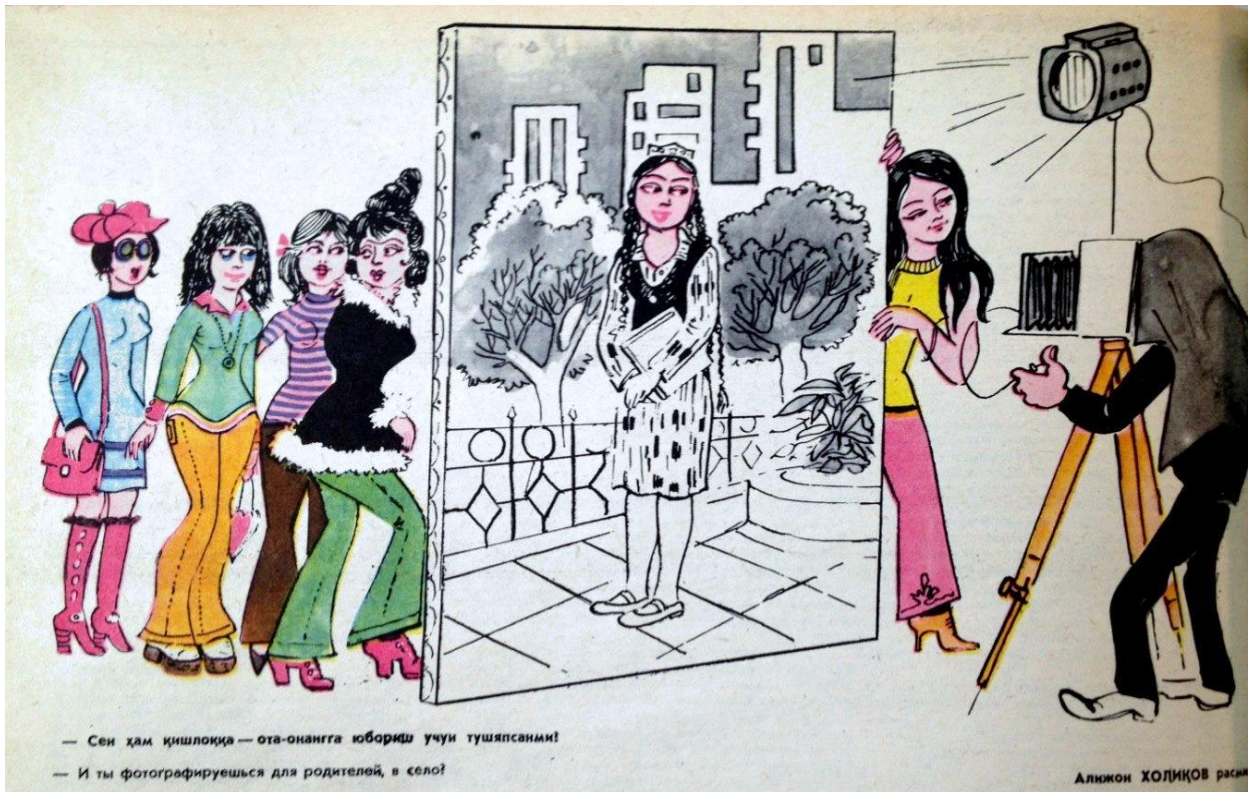


Figure 5.6. Straddling Europeanized and traditionalist norms of dress. Caption: “Are you also getting a picture taken to send to your parents in the village?” Source: Image by Alijon Holiqov, *Mushtum* no. 23 (Dec. 1981): 8.

norms had acquired in late Soviet Central Asia, even while highlighting the fluidity with which individual Central Asians moved across them.

The divergent accounts offered by two Uzbek residents of Tashkent in the 1970s demonstrate how “publics” governed by different norms could coexist even within a single city. Go’zal Pasilova and Nodira Mustafоеva were born within a year of one another in the late Soviet period (in 1968 and 1969 respectively), and both lived in Tashkent for their entire lives. Yet while Pasilova grew up in a “Europeanized” central area of the city, in a neighborhood today known as “Labzak,” Mustafоеva lived in a mahalla on the outskirts of the city called Sharq Yulduzi, which she characterized as “traditional”

and “conservative.”⁵¹ Even within the same city and during the same decade, these two districts constituted markedly different normative realms in which the ambient social pressures pushed toward different – and at times even mutually exclusive – forms of female dress.

The most salient sticking point in this divergence between the Labzak and Sharq Yulduzi neighborhoods in Tashkent was the attitude toward the wearing of *lozim*, the long traditional-style pants worn under a loose-fitting *ko'krak burma* dress as part of the national costume for Uzbek women. Articles on proper “modern” dress in the Central Asian press of the 1950s and 1960s had tended to denounce *lozim* using a wide range of negative labels – they were uncultured, they were unhygienic, or else they were re-categorized as a form of “homewear” or underclothing that should never be visible in public – and many urban and “Europeanizing” public spheres seem to have replicated these attitudes.⁵² At the same time, within many villages, mahallas, and cities adhering to traditionalist gender norms, *lozim* were regarded as an essential component of modest and appropriate female dress. A letter to the editor published in the Uzbek-language women’s magazine *Saodat* in March of 1971 offers a window into the dilemma that this divide posed for many Central Asian women. The letter was written by a group of young Uzbek women from the city of Shahrisabz who had discovered, to their embarrassment and dismay, that their accustomed standards of dress were regarded as socially unacceptable on the modern, bustling streets of central Tashkent. “When we went to Tashkent, we wore *atlas* dresses with *atlas lozim*, and people laughed at us,” they wrote. “But if we wear only a dress and go around with our legs exposed, our parents will not like it much. How should we dress in this situation?”⁵³ The reply from the journal’s editors affirmed the “urban” consensus that *lozim* were a form of underclothing, stating, “It is true that, even if they are made of *atlas*, *lozim* are underclothes. So it is necessary to conceal them

⁵¹ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview; Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview, 12 May 2014.

⁵² Mirzakalon Ismoiliiy, “Odob – Madaniyatning Ko’zgusi,” *Saodat* no. 12 (Dec. 1976): 21.

⁵³ “Yangi liboslar,” *Saodat*, Mar. 1972, 31.

from people when one is on the street.” The editors suggested that in order to avoid mockery in Tashkent while adhering to the standards of modesty required by their parents, the young women should modify the *lozim* to resemble a more modern pair of slacks (Uzb. *shim*) and wear them, as before, with a knee-length dress. “Without a doubt,” they explain, “such clothing is very suitable for girls, and the parents will also approve.”

On one level, this letter serves as a vivid reminder of the quantity of moral ground that the local-language Central Asian press was willing to cede to “traditionalist” norms, failing to contradict the tight familial and community regulation of female modesty even while reaffirming Tashkent’s Europeanized standards of propriety.⁵⁴ But on another level, in spite of the editors’ attempt to locate a neutral middle ground (ignoring, it should be noted, the continued stigmatization of women wearing slacks in many Central Asian communities), the letter demonstrates how the coexistence of Europeanizing and traditionalist norms could present women with two losing choices – backwardness or cultural loss, immodest fashion or unfashionable modesty. In one photograph which she dated to 1979, Shoira Asadova pointed out a young woman who sought to split the difference in this way by wearing a turtleneck to cover her neck and arms underneath a short-sleeved *atlas* dress. She immediately gave herself away, Asadova said, as a “girl from the countryside.” “To wear a turtleneck under a *xonatlas* dress like that – I would not allow myself to do that [*ja sebe ne pozvoli*],” she commented. “But she did. That’s the difference” (Figure 5.7).

The situational and spatial division in norms of women’s dress, even to the point of total incompatibility, played out in microcosm on the streets of Tashkent. Go’zal Pasilova described how women in the city center would face insults and laughter when wearing their “stinking *lozim*” in public, a

⁵⁴ For a further discussion of the leeway granted in the Soviet local-language press to Central Asian traditionalism, particularly with regard to the dress of women and the younger generation, see Chapter 4.



Figure 5.7. Making the “Uzbek national dress” modest. A “rural” young woman wearing a turtleneck under a *xonatlas* dress, 1979. Source: Shoira Asadova, personal interview, 16 May 2014.

barb that seems to have translated the hygienic objections of the Soviet press into more visceral form.⁵⁵ Presumed to be visitors from the villages, Pasilova said, such women “were condemned [*osuzhdali*], even by people who were Uzbek themselves, but who lived in the city.” Her mother, who had been born in the Ferghana Valley city of Kokand and moved to Tashkent shortly before Pasilova’s birth in 1968, would occasionally wear her own *lozim* in public when shopping at a nearby neighborhood store in spite of this stigma. But her daughters, evidently painfully aware of the social meanings and repercussions of this act – people would rudely push and jostle, and “their faces showed that they were dissatisfied,” Pasilova said – sought to dissuade her. “When she would go out,” Pasilova recalled, “I would say to her, ‘Take them off, please, they will say this is – [pause] from the village [*iz derevni*].’” The implication that the association of *lozim* with the rural milieu was in itself an element of its stigma is echoed in the recollections of another resident of “Europeanized” Tashkent. Ravshan Nazarov, born in 1966 in Tashkent’s central “Akademgorodok” district, explained that male elements of traditional dress, too, could be deprecated as excessively rural: “We practically never wore skull caps [Uzb. *do’ppi*, Russ. *tiubeteiki*], we practically never wore galoshes [of a variety often characterized as “national” or “Asiatic”], because these were considered signs of provincialism – a ‘country man’ [Eng.]”⁵⁶

If this charged rhetoric demonstrates how deeply rooted and richly layered the urban-rural divide had become in Central Asian consumption discourse by the late Soviet period, the example of Tashkent’s Sharq Yulduzi mahalla reveals its basic descriptive inadequacy. Nodira Mustofoeva states that in Sharq Yulduzi, *lozim* were very much a part of urban life: “They always adhered to national clothing – long *lozim* and dresses.”⁵⁷ Moreover, national dress was not merely an available option in her neighborhood in the way that it wasn’t in central Tashkent; it was integrally related to the obligation to

⁵⁵ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview. On the application of Soviet hygienic discourses to Central Asian material culture, see Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview.

⁵⁷ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

preserve female modesty within the mahalla milieu. Due to the comparatively liberal and “Europeanizing” attitudes of her parents, Mustofoeva said, she had been permitted to deviate from the requirement to wear a dress and *lozim* as a child. “I generally wore shorts and t-shirts, until I was fifteen years old,” she recalled. But as she matured, the mahalla’s public norms were reasserted. Members of the mahalla began to criticize her clothing choices and, when she was fifteen, finally stepped in and asked Mustofoeva’s mother to correct her behavior: “The neighbors came out and said, ‘Hey! Bring your daughter into line [*privedi dochku v poriadok*]. What is this, wearing shorts?!’” Her mother acquiesced. She asked Mustofoeva to dress more modestly, though softening the tone of the request considerably: “My mother asked [*poprosila*] me, ‘My dear daughter, please change into this dress.’”

Women who wore slacks in public or cut their hair short, Mustofoeva recalled, were subject to similar censure from her mahalla neighbors. When her older sister cut her hair in the mid-1970s, it sparked a major family quarrel. Mustofoeva interpreted the cause of the dispute as her parents’ anticipation of the community reaction within the mahalla: “I think the problem was that she needed to get married. She was seventeen years old, and in any case there were traditions. We were still in a traditional mahalla, although we lived in a multi-story building.” Here, again, the norms in Sharq-Yulduzi directly contradicted the fashions in central Tashkent. Go’zal Pasilova recalled that, as a child, she had been fascinated by the trend of short haircuts for women and had begged her mother to wear her hair in such a style: “I constantly asked her, ‘Mama, cut your hair, please. You’re beautiful; if you cut your hair you’ll be even more beautiful. Please, mama.’” Reflecting on her desire for her mother to have short hair, Pasilova suggests how culturally laden the concept of fashion had become in the capital city, carrying its own set of insidious pressures: “I wanted for her to look – how to say it – European [*evropeiski*].” The distinct consumption norms at play within these two Tashkent neighborhoods were each burdened with their own implied cultural attachments and idealized models of femininity.

It is crucial to note that, even apart from “urban” and “rural,” characterizing the differences between Tashkent’s Labzak and Sharq Yulduzi neighborhoods in terms of a distinction between “New City” and “mahalla” would be in many ways misleading, as Mustofoeva’s observation about living in a multi-story building implies. In the pre-revolutionary and early Soviet periods, Tashkent’s “New City” and “Old City” tended to be described as sharply differentiated spaces in terms both of built environment and of demographics, with the New City characterized by broad avenues, colonial Russian-style construction, and a predominantly “European” population, while the Old City was inhabited largely by Uzbeks and contoured by walled courtyards and a “labyrinth of ancient narrow streets.”⁵⁸ By the late 1960s, however, the distinctions were no longer so clear. Ravshan Nazarov described Tashkent’s Akademgorodok as the “European part” of the city, but his neighbors were predominantly Uzbek members of the local academic elite. Cultural “Europeanization” thus did not always entail a demographic predominance of non-Central Asians. Even more remarkably, Mustofoeva’s “traditionalist mahalla” was not an ancient relic of the pre-revolutionary period, nor even a community with its roots in the early Soviet years. Instead, it was a collection of newly built apartment buildings that had been constructed on the outskirts of the city following the 1966 earthquake. Paul Stronski has described the near-total erasure of the pre-revolutionary built environment that the earthquake rendered in Tashkent, describing the post-1966 capital as a “blank slate” on which Soviet planners could construct a “pseudo-Magnitogorsk” completely of their own design.⁵⁹ To the extent that Mustofoeva’s mahalla was “traditionalist,” then, it was not in the capacity of a self-contained and bounded community providing inertial resistance to outside forces, but rather of a newly constituted, Soviet-built community that nevertheless took on the conservative public norms and regulatory functions, including with regard to female modesty and sexuality, of a traditional mahalla. It is not at all obvious why this process of

⁵⁸ This last description comes from a 1951 Russian-language travelogue. Viktor Vitkovich, *Puteshestvie po Sovetskomu Uzbekistanu* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Molodaia gvardiia,” 1951), 25.

⁵⁹ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 254.

traditionalization occurred in some of these new Soviet-era communities and not in others. Mustofoeva herself proposed the strict ethnic homogeneity of her mahalla, and particularly the lack of an appreciable Russian population, as an explanation: “In our mahalla there was not even a single Russian family... Even at the beginning of the year 2000, when ethnographers came to our mahalla... they discovered that there was not one family of a different nationality. Do you understand? Only Uzbek families lived there, one hundred percent. And for this reason these traditions were held very strongly.” Regardless of the explanation, though, the case of Sharq Yulduzi demonstrates the shortcomings of a strictly linear and unidirectional understanding of urbanization and Europeanization in Soviet Central Asia. Traditionalist norms were not in fact “survivals of the past” (*perezhitki proshlogo*), to use the Soviet term, and did not even depend on any continuity spatially or in terms of community membership with the pre-Soviet era, but were being continually reconstituted in the lived experience of a post-war, consumerist, socialist Central Asia.

Curated selves: Cultivating ethnicity and modernity in the domestic interior

While the abstract bifurcation in post-war Central Asian life between Europeanization and traditionalism, linked to the distinction between European-style and national-style goods, existed in the realm of furnishings, household objects, and interior décor as well, it was governed by a quite different set of rules and possibilities. In accord with much of the consumer advice about interior décor in the local-language press, the interior was frequently seen as a space for the blending and balancing of both European-style and national-style goods simultaneously. In the case of clothing, to be sure, such “hybridization” was by no means unheard of. In the villages of Tashkent oblast’ in 1966, an ethnographic study claims, the Uzbek *do’ppi* skull cap was “worn by all men without exception, with both national and European costume.”⁶⁰ Dinara Sultanbekova observed that while long Kyrgyz-style

⁶⁰ Zhilina, “Sovremennaia material’naia kul’tura sel’skogo naseleniia Tashkentskoi oblasti Uzbekskoi SSR,” 134.

dresses and the *elechek* head-wrapping were regarded as impermissible markers of rural traditionalism in the capital city of Frunze where she lived, the *chepken* vest was less stigmatized, and she would occasionally wear a colorfully embroidered one on top of a European-style dress.⁶¹ Yet adherence to situationally shifting requirements of fashion was frequently imagined in all-or-nothing terms. Interior décor, by contrast, offered a more expansive canvas for self-presentation, and it was routine, and in some cases even expected, for individuals to arrange their homes in such a way as to speak to European and Central Asian identities simultaneously. Whereas fashion was a sphere that required code-switching in late Soviet Central Asia, the home interior often became a space of self-curation, where a joint European/ national or modern/ traditional sense of self could be constructed through the careful selection and display of disparate objects.

Of course, hybridity was not the only ideal to which Central Asian consumers aspired in their home décor. In particular, the prestige attached to goods not of local production, especially those imported from beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, superimposed a hierarchy of wealth and status over the European-national division in Central Asian consumer goods. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the Soviet Union, Ravshan Nazarov explained, Central Asians tended to think of the quality and beauty of furniture as existing on a kind of sliding scale that correlated roughly with the distance of its point of origin from the local: “Furniture that was produced in the European part of the USSR – the Baltics, Belorussia, and Ukraine – was categorized highly. Furniture was considered especially good if it came from European socialist countries – the GDR, Bulgaria, Poland, Yugoslavia... If it was from non-socialist countries, for example from Finland, this was already the absolutely highest level.” Although national-style goods were not universally deprecated as inferior or low in status, then, imported European goods possessed a special cachet, and some families aspired to own them exclusively. In the home of her maternal grandmother, Go’zal Pasilova said, the prominence of immaculate imported and European-

⁶¹ Dinara Sultanbekova, personal interview.

style objects – German porcelain, a sofa and armchair covered in white linen, a “beautiful” wooden buffet – provided an unmistakable indicator her socioeconomic status: “My grandmother was a very wealthy woman, and she liked to live in luxury.” If on one level “Europeanizing” and “traditionalist” norms of consumption were simply grounded in differing values and priorities, in another sense the “traditionalist” norm was sporadically associated in the dominant Soviet rhetoric with poverty and privation, while the “urban” norm was associated with comfort and luxury.

Indeed, it was not uncommon for my informants to characterize a dearth of European-style items in the home as an indicator of financial constraint, and correspondingly to frame their eventual acquisition as a form of upward mobility. In a frequently repeated narrative, young Central Asians – most often of the wartime generation of my respondents’ parents – arrived in the city with little in the way of European-style furniture and gradually saved up to buy the purported essentials of urban life, including a dining table and chairs, metal-frame beds, cupboards and hutches.⁶² When her parents moved from an overwhelmingly ethnically Kyrgyz village to the town of Kant on the outskirts of Frunze in 1977, Salamat Beshimova (b. 1967, female, Kyrgyz) remembered becoming conscious of her family’s difference, complaining to her mother that their sparsely decorated apartment compared unfavorably to the “beautiful” home of a Russian neighbor: “We don’t have anything, [only] one table.”⁶³ Shoira Asadova recalled that moving from a small village to the city of Bukhara when she was five years old meant that “there was a period in which my parents, being rural residents, were mastering [*osvaivali*] the city and mastering a new way of life in the city.” But because they were “quite educated, young, and ambitious [*stremitel’nyimi*],” she said, they worked to acquire both the objects and the cultured habits characteristic of the new way of life, especially as it concerned the reception of urban guests: “We also set out a table and chairs. A table for when we were receiving guests... When you sat at the

⁶² This narrative is common in the interviews of Shoira Asadova, Go’zal Pasilova, and Ziyoda Usmanova.

⁶³ Salamat Beshimova, personal interview, 11 Aug. 2014.

table, everyone would have set out a separate plate individually. Spoons, forks, that kind of table setting.” Asadova conceded that such practices “were normal for European life, probably for American too, and for Russians,” but emphasized both their novelty for her parents and the personal achievement they signified: “At that time, in the 1970s, and if you also emphasize that my parents came from the village, young rural people, [you will understand] the extent to which they mastered the daily life [of the city], the modern way of setting the table. They set out separate plates, spoons and forks, wine glasses.”⁶⁴ The specific objects Asadova names – the table and chairs, spoons and forks, wine glasses – sketch out the particularly Central Asian variant of the ideal of “culturedness” that was advocated in the Soviet press. A European-style table and chairs meant no longer sitting on the floor, on a quilt or a mat, to eat meals; spoons and forks meant no longer eating with the hands; and wine glasses signaled the consumption of a “cultured” luxury of the sort recommended by expert Soviet taste-makers.⁶⁵ The explicit mention that the dining table was used “when we were receiving guests” again underscores the crucial role of these objects in the formation and maintenance of social relationships; the arrangement of the home for the reception of guests became one means of conveying a desired self-presentation before others as well as fulfilling local social obligations. Yet Asadova gives no indication that this process of “mastering the daily life of the city” was an unwilling or unpleasant one for her parents. Instead, she presents it as a matter of conscious and deliberate cultivation, with these new objects and habits becoming symbolic both of her parents’ integration into the more modern and “cultured” life of the city and of their growing material comfort.

In spite of the implied hierarchy between European-style and national-style goods, however, there were also many instances in which Central Asian consumers approached the ownership and display of both national-style and European-style objects within the home with a similar degree of

⁶⁴ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 3.

deliberate, self-conscious purposefulness. While traditional-style goods could at times be depicted as the vestiges of a less prosperous and less modern way of life, they could also be consumed as cherished markers of ethno-cultural belonging and authenticity. Victoria Koroteyeva and Ekaterina Makarov speculatively posit a chronological shift in Central Asian consumer attitudes, located approximately in the 1960s, away from the uniquely high prestige of European goods and toward a more hybridizing sensibility: “When modern furniture ceased to be a rarity, like many other industrially produced goods, native urban dwellers made special efforts to keep at least one room of their houses furnished ‘in a national way,’ as they put it. Tradition became a self-conscious value only when Uzbeks felt confident that they fully shared in modern civilization.”⁶⁶ This trajectory matches the observations of a number of Soviet ethnographers in the late Soviet period (in spite of the linear, evolutionary vision of modernization they typically espoused). In a 1979 study, G.P. Vasil’eva posited a recent process of the “revival of the ethnic functions of tradition [*etnicheskikh funktsii traditsii*]” in Central Asian consumption practices, even while framing this as part of a broader trend of internationalization that would culminate in the “erasure of national specificities.”⁶⁷ A 1981 survey of urban Kyrgyz families on attitudes toward national-style objects in home décor explained what such a “revival” might entail: according to S.I. Karakeeva, while workers’ families, “especially those who have not been settled in the city for long,” tended to desire European-style objects because they “see the appealing side of urban life,” Kyrgyz intelligentsia families who “have lived in the city for a long time [and] are accustomed to urban life” tended to “have a great desire to acquire objects of national décor.”⁶⁸ It should be noted that the survey found that, at least by 1981, attitudes toward Kyrgyz-style objects were generally positive among

⁶⁶ Victoria Koroteyeva and Ekaterina Makarova, “Money and Social Connections in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Uzbek City,” *Central Asian Survey* 17/4 (1998): 583.

⁶⁷ G.P. Vasil’eva, “Nekotorye tendentsii razvitiia sovremennykh natsional’nykh traditsii v material’noi kul’ture narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 3 (1979): 29.

⁶⁸ S.I. Karakeeva, *Sovremennaia kirgizskaia gorodskaia sem’ia* (Frunze: Izdatel'stvo “Ilim,” 1981), 33-34.

both groups, and “only a small portion of surveyed workers (6.7%) and representatives of the intelligentsia (2.3%) indicated a negative attitude among members of their families toward objects of national décor and national implements.” The broader nostalgic turn in the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union likely played a role as well, with consumer preferences mirroring the revitalized interest in “folk crafts” in the artistic sphere. As Krisztina Fehervary has observed in socialist Hungary, by the 1970s, “organic shapes, so-called natural colors and materials, and aged or brightly colored folk artifacts” were embraced by consumers as “a way of breathing life, color, and character into what were increasingly seen as cold, gray, and uniform materialities.”⁶⁹

While the existence of a Brezhnev-era moment of renewed prestige for national-style decor seems well-supported both in the observations of Soviet ethnographers and in the discourses of the local-language press (see Chapter 3), there is evidence that Central Asian consumers were undertaking self-conscious and deliberate acts of curation, combining the “national” with the “modern,” even much earlier. In the diary of Mahsuda M., a rare instance of a diary written by an Uzbek woman during the Soviet period, with entries covering the years from 1945 to 1952, the writer recounts her move from an extended-family home in a Tashkent *mahalla* to newly-built apartments in predominantly Russian neighborhoods and cities. Perhaps especially prone to self-consciousness of her nationality in such an environment, she nevertheless evinces more excitement than anxiety as she chronicles her efforts to furnish her new apartment in a manner blending newly acquired possessions with old, inherited ones: sewing lacy white curtains, buying green glass lampshades, commissioning new sofas and wooden tables, and hanging Uzbek rugs and tapestries on her walls.⁷⁰ Later, in a diary entry from 1950, she describes with interest and approval a hybrid decorating scheme in the home of an Uzbek neighbor,

⁶⁹ Krisztina Fehervary, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 142.

⁷⁰ “Dnevnik Makhsudy M,” *XX vek v vospominaniakh, ustnykh istoriakh, pis'makh i dnevnikakh zhenshchin Uzbekistana*, ed. Marfua Tokhtakhodzhaeva (Moscow: Natalis, 2008), 273 [20 May 1948].

specifically applying the labels “Uzbek” and “European” to different elements of the decor: “The living room is decorated in Uzbek style [*po-uzbekski*] – rugs, a low table [that is, a *xontaxta*], and around it beautiful velvet *ko’rpachas* [quilts or mats for sitting]... But on the windows there are white curtains, draped in the European style [*po-evropeiski*], just like in a theater.”⁷¹ On the one hand, the way in which national cultures were objectified and externalized within Soviet nationalities policy seems to have encouraged such acts of selective consumption as a method for the elaboration of identities. To the extent that nationalities were defined in terms of a small number of concrete markers of difference – national costume, national cuisine, national folk art, and so on – nationality itself could become consumable. On the other hand, it is highly characteristic that Mahsuda describes becoming conscious of novel goods and alternative models of consumption primarily through the medium of face-to-face social interaction, both with Russian families living in the region and with other ethnic Central Asians. Even as European-style objects were being extensively discussed and promoted in the Soviet press, local social life and daily exposure seem to have served as crucial catalysts for the dissemination of new consumption practices.

By the later decades of the Soviet era, the practice of maintaining a spatial division within the home between rooms decorated in European style and rooms decorated in national style had evidently become commonplace. This sort of compartmentalization was periodically recommended in the local-language press of the 1970s; recall the 1977 Kyrgyz-language article which stated, “If there are many rooms [in the home] and one is decorated according to national traditions [*eldik satta zhasalgalap koiso*], it will be very satisfactory.”⁷² In the Kyrgyz case, as Dinara Sultanbekova explained, the aspiration was specifically to have one room decorated like the interior of a yurt, with wool *shyrdaks*, a stack of

⁷¹ “Dnevnik Makhsudy M,” 286 [12 Apr. 1950].

⁷² M. Abdykerimova, “Zhashagan zhaidy zhasalgalai bileli,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 12 (Dec. 1977), 23.

quilts and pillows for seating guests, and sacks or cloth shelves for storing utensils.⁷³ In Uzbekistan, the designated national-style room was usually a second dining room, containing a low Uzbek dining table (*xontaxta*) and quilts for sitting (*ko'rpachas*). “Every Uzbek family, where I grew up, and where I live now, always had a *xontaxta*... Even if the family is super-duper *intelligentnyi* [that is, cultured, educated, belonging to the intelligentsia] and Europeanized – every family has *ko'rpas* and *ko'rpachas*,” Nodira Mustofoeva explained with great animation.⁷⁴ Her phrasing suggests, as in her exegesis of the distinction between “Europeanization” and “Russification,” an effort to assert the basic compatibility between Central Asianness and an identity as a modern, educated person with an internationalist outlook, and the incorporation of both European-style and national-style goods into the domestic interior could communicate a similar message.

In addition to its function in signifying a personal cultural allegiance or self-identification, though, keeping both European-style and national-style rooms also fulfilled a specific social purpose. It was, of course, not unheard of for consumers to combine European-style and national-style objects within a single room, as Mahsuda describes in her diary. (Even within the same room, though, a certain spatial division might be maintained; in describing what it meant to decorate a home “with taste,” Shoiras Asadova explained that it was necessary “not to put everything out in an uncoordinated way... to choose dishes harmoniously, let’s say, crystal, tea services – to not place national [dishes] there, but only European, or [to have] a different hutch where you place only national dishes.”⁷⁵) But the maintenance of parallel national-style and European-style rooms – not coincidentally, almost always parallel dining or living areas – created the functional prerequisites for greeting guests in accordance with either European or local expectations, as the situation demanded. Especially among urban and

⁷³ Dinara Sultanbekova, personal interview.

⁷⁴ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

⁷⁵ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

intelligentsia families, for whom cross-cultural or cross-ethnic sociability was particularly likely through the workplace, the ability to receive guests in both European and national contexts was viewed as all but a social requirement. Most obviously, the European-style room could be used for receiving Russian or other non-Central Asian friends and co-workers, and the national-style room could be used when entertaining relatives and acquaintances from villages. Shoiras Asadova noted that her parents, as first-generation urbanites, “were very connected with the countryside,” and when relatives came to visit from the *qishloq*, “they preferred to sit on *ko’rpachas*, [so] we had *ko’rpachas* and a *xontaxta*.” “But for our modern guests [*nashi sovremennye gosti*], for urban guests,” she continued, “we always set the [European-style] table and chairs.”⁷⁶ Aibek Ismailov similarly noted that in his family home in the small village of Ak-Zhar in the 1960s, his father, “as an educated member of the intelligentsia [*obrazovannyi, intelligentnyi chelovek*],” eventually acquired a table and chairs, to be used when receiving official guests from the city.⁷⁷ But what about, for example, ethnically Central Asian co-workers? Nodira Mustofoeva, at least, implies that the distinction might depend more on the context of the relationship than on the ethnicity of the guest. “My mother always greeted guests in this way,” she explained: “in one room it was Europeanized, with tables and chairs, forks and spoons, and in another room, a long *xontaxta* with *ko’rpachas*. Uzbeks who came as guests from work, of course, went to where the tables and chairs were, in the Europeanized part of the house. Relatives sat at the *xontaxta*.”⁷⁸ On one level, the maintenance of dual European-style and national-style spaces for receiving guests within the home can be understood as a functional adaptation to the duality of cultural worlds and consumption practices in late Soviet Central Asia – not only between ethnic Russians and ethnic Central Asians, but between “urban” and “rural” or Europeanizing or traditionalist cultural commitments among Central Asians

⁷⁶ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

⁷⁷ Aibek Ismailov, personal interview.

⁷⁸ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

themselves. On another level, though, this arrangement did not only reflect but contributed to one particular way of constructing this duality, in which the “European” came to be associated with the public and professional world while the “national” was linked to familial and intimate contexts.

In imagining the domestic interior as a curated space where Europeanness and Central Asianness could be placed in a non-zero-sum juxtaposition, then, it must be remembered that what was at stake was not just personal self-expression. To be sure, individual preference and the performance of a particular personal identity played a role, and could manifest itself in which living and dining area the family would choose to utilize in its daily life, in the absence of guests. Nodira Mustofoeva, for example, said that her mother – whom she identified as “advanced” and “Europeanized,” though living in a Tashkent mahalla where traditionalist norms of dress were enforced – personally preferred to use the European-style table and chairs. Among Shoiras Asadova’s parents, by contrast – the ambitious young people she said had “mastered” the lifestyle of urban Bukhara while remaining in contact with their rural roots – the everyday preference was for the *xontaxta* and *ko’rpachas*.⁷⁹ But while such preferences could vary by individual, they did not override the need to demonstrate a dual cultural competency, a fluency in the norms of both Europeanized and traditionalist modes of sociability, reflected in the maintenance of parallel European-style and national-style guest spaces within the home. In some ways, the situation was not dissimilar from the code-switching required in the realm of dress, in which compartmentalized consumption habits reflected the social need to speak to two cultural systems simultaneously as much as an individual effort to craft a “hybrid” identity.

This is not to say that individual Central Asians did not relate to both European-style and national-style domestic objects in an idiosyncratic way or imbue them with their own intimate meanings. Go’zal Pasilova offered an anecdote to illustrate what a set of imported crystal vases, quintessential markers of luxury and “Europeanized” culturedness, had meant in her none-too-wealthy

⁷⁹ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview; Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

family, where such things were rarely attainable. She said that her mother had spotted these two vases – Czech, with a label reading “Bohemia” on them – in a local commission store, and vowed to save up money to buy them if nobody else bought them first. “And we also,” Pasilova said, “we girls also wanted so much for there to be something beautiful in our home. We lived simply.” She recalled that in clothing, as well, she and her sisters had always especially valued anything that might allow them to simulate a wealthier and more luxurious lifestyle. They had sewn purses from scraps of their grandmother’s old dresses and made hairpins or earrings from adornments on old pairs of shoes. “We tried to appear fashionable and extravagant,” she explained, laughing. So, she said, they all felt excited when they had finally saved up enough money to buy the two crystal vases. Once again, presenting a certain image to others constituted a central goal; the main use for the vases, she said, was to hold flowers when guests came to visit. On one occasion, after the guests had left, she had been washing the vases and accidentally washed off the “Bohemia” label. “My mother said to me, ‘Don’t wash that, don’t wash that! Leave it alone!’” she recalled, her voice mimicking her mother’s panic. Afterward, she carefully glued the label back on the vase, and subsequently took it upon herself to guard its integrity: “Later, when my younger sisters were washing it, I myself would come over and say, ‘Be careful not to wash off the label!’ [Laughs.]”⁸⁰ On the one hand, Pasilova reflected somewhat ironically on this concern for external appearances and fascination with foreign imports, observing that it was “not the vase itself, but this label” that was considered valuable. At the same time, however, she told the story with obvious affection, underscoring the sensations of joy, pride, and pleasure that this act of “conspicuous consumption” brought to her financially struggling family, with the vases serving in a narrative of both personal aesthetic fulfillment and social success.

The acquisition of a particularly desired national-style object, too, could be the subject of pleasurable reminiscences. Nodira Mustofoeva – who strongly self-identified, it should be recalled, as

⁸⁰ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

belonging to a “Europeanized” Uzbek family – described with relish her family’s purchase of “a *xontaxta* painted with a picture of Samarkand – lacquered, heavy.” She also took pains to emphasize the essential role of national-style goods in the maintenance of a national identity: “An Uzbek family without *ko’rpachas* – well, I don’t know, maybe I’m thinking too traditionally, but everyone must have *ko’rpachas*.” But it is striking that, at least in the limited context of my interviews, the specific meanings such items carried in terms of ethno-cultural affiliations and identities often remained ambiguous and only loosely enunciated. Asked to explain why it was so necessary for an Uzbek family to have *ko’rpachas*, Mustofoeva cited their ceremonial necessity for the proper observance of a funeral: “It’s not allowed to put chairs there. They spread out a *ko’rpacha*, and [women] are supposed to sit around it. I don’t know, this is a tradition.”⁸¹ Ziyoda Usmonova’s account of her move to a Moscow apartment in 1982 offers another highly characteristic example. She described boarding the train from Andijan to Moscow with a heavy trunk [Uzb. *sandiq*] laden with dishes and blankets, and little else. I asked her whether these dishes and blankets had been in national (that is, Uzbek) style, and she responded with a kind of labyrinthine analysis of her own motivations:

National, yes. Everything was in national style. Well, I will explain to you why. I didn’t want to spend money to buy all of these blankets in Moscow... My stipend was 100 rubles. So I didn’t want to – all of this was from my dowry. If I had these things, why would I need to buy them? It was cheaper to bring them from there. So I brought them, our national *piyolas*, *kosas*, spoons, national forks, a teapot. And probably – now I’m already thinking like an ethnologist – probably somewhere there was a connection with my national identity. I wanted, in my home, to see something from my homeland [*iz moei rodiny*]. Probably. I think so. [Laughs.] I analyze myself in this way. [Laughs.]⁸²

Even when she eventually arrived at the explanation of “national identity,” she piled on a series of qualifiers and hedges, her laughter only heightening the sense of bemused distancing. Asked whether

⁸¹ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

⁸² Ziyoda Usmonova, personal interview.

she had thought about such a motivation at the time, she replied, “No, at that time I didn’t think so. I just brought them, and that was that.”

Such curiously under-articulated references to both “tradition” and “national identity” might be interpreted as an indication of just how naturalized national goods and ethno-national belonging had become in local Soviet-era discourse, to the point where Central Asians might consume national-style goods completely unselfconsciously. Yet even disregarding the broader discursive context that heavily loaded such choices with significance, this vagueness stands in stark contrast to the often highly deliberate way that Central Asians incorporated national-style objects in their home décor. It is revealing, for instance, that in addition to her national-style dishes and blankets, Ziyoda Usmonova also furnished her Moscow apartment with a *beshtik*, the traditional Uzbek-style cradle that was the subject of perhaps the most persistent and vitriolic attacks in the local Soviet press as an indicator of unhygienic backwardness. “My son was three months old when I left for Moscow,” she explained. “There weren’t any Pampers at that time, and the baby slept soundly in the *beshtik*.” In case there was any doubt that she was aware at that time of the stigma attached to this object, she dispels it by describing the reactions of her peers: “All of my girlfriends laughed at me and said, ‘What are you doing, you’ll disfigure your baby [*uroduesh’ rebenka*].’ But I said, ‘It’s so convenient for me!’ [Laughs.]”⁸³ Once again, we see the heavy-handed, didactic discourse of the Soviet press being transmitted into the intimate social sphere, here in the form of casual conversations among girlfriends about child-rearing practices. But in this case, it is partially subverted by being reproduced in a light-hearted, half-joking form. Usmonova’s response to their gibes, citing “convenience” as opposed to any particular political or cultural reasoning, is also characteristic; witness, as well, Shoirra Asadova’s statement, “We never rejected what was national for us, because the need and necessity was always there [*potomu chto*

⁸³ Ziyoda Usmonova, personal interview.

potrebnost' i neobkhodimost' vsegda byla].”⁸⁴ Yet even asserting the pragmatic usefulness of an object like the *beshik* was not without political and cultural meaning in the context of an official discourse that categorically rejected it as harmful and anti-modern. The greatest significance of local-style consumer goods as a medium of national self-expression and commentary on questions of ethnicity, identity, and modernity may lie precisely with the fact that their meanings in these terms remained evasive and under-verbalized. In the Soviet context, where the world of words was subject to such careful scrutiny and such pervasive control, consumption provided an extra-rhetorical space within which it was possible to articulate selves, affinities, and communities.⁸⁵

Social stratification and the intersection of ethnicity and class

It is already obvious that many of the categories my oral history respondents routinely employed to describe differences in consumption in Soviet Central Asia, especially the urban-rural distinction and the privileged category of “intelligentsia,” carried overtones of distinctions in wealth as well as in cultural practice. The division between European-style and traditional-style consumption, although ostensibly elective and cultural in nature, intersected in a complicated way with the socioeconomic stratification of late Soviet Central Asian society. In some ways, this is hardly surprising; it is difficult to imagine a discussion of the social dynamics of consumption without some accounting for differences of wealth and class. As Pierre Bourdieu observes, distinctions in consumption patterns and “tastes” may frequently serve as a means of inscribing and legitimating class differences: “Aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing, or home decoration are opportunities to experience

⁸⁴ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

⁸⁵ Juliane Furst makes a similar argument with regard to Russian *stiliagi*, noting that they “sidestepp[ed] the ideological debate, which the state had successfully monopolized,” and “challenged the system on new, unfamiliar, and most importantly, non-textual grounds.” Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 213.

or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept."⁸⁶ The situation is complicated in the Soviet case due to the highly specific (more ascriptive than descriptive) official usage of the concept of "class" in that context and the unique interplay of wealth, professional standing, and informal connectedness that governed access to desired goods in the late Soviet period.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, as both the rhetoric of the local-language press and the recollections of interviewees attest, Soviet Central Asian life in the post-war period carried the omnipresent flavor of class distinctions: visible differences in wealth and consumption; a pervasive sense that certain luxuries were only accessible to the wealthy; feelings of aspiration, envy, or disapproval in relation to those who had more; feelings of pity, condescension, or alienation in relation to those who had less. A systematic sociological or economic analysis of class in post-war Soviet Central Asia is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is nonetheless worthwhile to examine local discourses of wealth and poverty, the cultural implications of perceived differences in purchasing power and consumption habits, and the ways individuals conceptualized and spoke about those who they believed were higher or lower than themselves on the socioeconomic ladder.⁸⁸ Such an examination, apart from simply suggesting the existence of a culturally significant degree of socioeconomic stratification in the region in the late Soviet period, elucidates a close relationship between the dynamics of conspicuous consumption and distinction, the particularly Soviet discourses urging or discouraging certain forms of consumer desire, and local experiences of ethnicity.

⁸⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 57.

⁸⁷ On the state's role in ascription of class in the early Soviet period, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 65/4 (Dec. 1993): 745-770.

⁸⁸ On distinctions in class and consumption habits between elites and non-elites in late Soviet Russia, see Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976). Smith defines "the privileged class" fairly narrowly, as "only the upper portion of [the] intelligentsia" numbering "well over a million and, counting relatives, several million" in the USSR as a whole, while my usage is probably quite a bit broader.

Even as it helped cultivate new local communities around the processes of exchange and consumption, differential access to goods could sow new divisions within Central Asian society as well. Most of my respondents concurred that it was a simple matter to distinguish wealthy people from poor people in Soviet Central Asia of the 1960s and 1970s on the basis of their consumption habits. The difference was, as Kokul Chekirova put it, “immediately visible.”⁸⁹ Chynara Osmonova, as a child of two members of the intelligentsia, had from an early age observed differences between her own home and that of a friend whose parents were factory workers: their furniture was smaller, more “modest” (*skromnyi*), and they had a less expensive carpet. Asked how she knew that their carpet was less expensive, she replied, “It was visible” – whereas her family’s carpet was hand-made, her friend’s was “purchased, factory-made [*pokupnoi, fabrichnoi*].”⁹⁰ She also noted that her friend’s clothes were most often home-made or of domestic production, whereas her own were typically imported. Perplexingly, some of my respondents even posited that such socioeconomic differences were *more* visible and pronounced during the Soviet era than they have become in the post-socialist period. “Nowadays,” said Shoiras Asadova, “it is hard to determine the status of the population, judging by their clothing. But at that time it was completely obvious [*javno na litso*] – your status, your material condition was immediately noticeable [*brosalos’ v glaza*] from your clothing.”⁹¹ Go’zal Pasilova, in a similar vein, suggested that the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption had been more pronounced in the late Soviet period than in the present: “In the Soviet period, people paid more attention to interior [décor], to luxury,” a phenomenon she elsewhere described using the Soviet epithet *veshchizm* – “the love of things.” “If someone had a color television, everyone knew about it,” she said. She speculated that it was precisely scarcity and difficulties of access that bred the preoccupation with consumer objects

⁸⁹ Kokul Chekirova, personal interview.

⁹⁰ Chynara Osmonova, personal interview.

⁹¹ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

during the Soviet period, whereas at present, “our market is saturated, everything is available – maybe because of this there’s not so much attention [to material goods].”⁹²

Whether or not such counterintuitive assessments are accurate, perceived differences in wealth and consumption constituted a persistent and powerful factor in the narratives of my respondents. In an impressionistic sense, there is a sharp distinction between those who described feeling that most consumer goods in Soviet society were accessible to them, and those who felt that certain goods were simply beyond their reach due to their families' limited means. This difference often made itself felt in the tone as much as the content of responses to my questions about experiences of consumption during the Soviet era. Some respondents, most often those whose parents had been members of the academic intelligentsia or had held positions within the Communist Party or local government, spoke expansively about the joy of obtaining desired things and, not infrequently, about the status and prestige these things afforded them among their peers. Their narratives tend to focus on the pleasures of consumption, with the obstacles in the way of accessing these goods only heightening their pride and delight in obtaining them. Nodira Mustofoeva recounted the ingenuity of her mother, a party member and activist, who managed to obtain three identical sets of high-quality German-made furniture for her three daughters, each from a different village in the region surrounding Tashkent, in the course of her travels outside of the capital to deliver lectures aimed at raising the “cultural level” of the rural population in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹³ Shoiri Asadova emphasized the sense of distinction from her peers that her especially high-quality clothing afforded her, noting that it was visible even in the absence of imported goods: “I stood out among my peers [*otlichalas’ ot svoikh sverstnikov*]. Even if it was a school uniform, for me it was usually bought from Moscow and sewn purely to European tastes.” When visiting family in a rural *qishloq*, where her relatives compelled her to dress in traditional-style clothing,

⁹² Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

⁹³ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

she nevertheless wore “clothes that were not as shapeless as the ones that the *qishloq* girls wore,” which her mother had ordered from “urban seamstresses who sewed more elegantly, with taste, beautifully.”⁹⁴

For others, by contrast, memories of consumption during the late Soviet period revolved not around personal fulfillment and consumerist triumph, but instead around the necessity of making do and maintaining appearances, above all taking measures to avoid being perceived as poor. In response to my questions about clothing and fashion, Dinara Sultanbekova responded, “I never followed fashion, I never chased after fashion,” because in order to do so, “a good income was needed.” She noted that she had been known as a real “Japanese beauty” (*iaponskaia krasavitsa*) in her youth, and would have liked to dress well. But because her family was never wealthy, she was not able to dress richly (*bogato*), and instead had to settle for dressing “acceptably” (*prilichno*).⁹⁵ Maintaining a minimum standard of social propriety was likewise a priority in Go’zal Pasilova’s household, where her father’s absence placed both the family’s budget and their social standing under strain. “My mother kept saving and saving money,” Pasilova explained. “People judged us [*osuzhdali*], [saying,] ‘Oh they don’t have a father, they’re abandoned.’ And so that they wouldn’t say that, my mother always tried to dress us well. So that nobody could say anything.”⁹⁶ In general, such financial struggles – which in many cases tended to be associated with familial dislocations such as divorce or the death or absence of a parent – seem to have been attached with a considerable amount of social stigma. This was also reflected in the way that my probing questions about personal possessions could unintentionally elicit reactions of discomfort, defensiveness, and indignation among those who had lived in conditions of comparative poverty during the Soviet period. Kokul Chekirova, who had grown up with only one working parent on a collective

⁹⁴ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

⁹⁵ Dinara Sultanbekova, personal interview.

⁹⁶ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

farm in the Kyrgyz village of Tiup, responded somewhat perfunctorily and impersonally to my questions about home décor, but took pains to point out the workings of socioeconomic stratification in her experience. Her small home contained one sofa and one bed, she said, whereas if a family owned a television, it indicated they were very wealthy; everyone in the village owned an embroidered Kyrgyz *tush-kiyiz*, “except poor people”; when she married in 1980, she received a dowry of ten blankets, some pillows, and dishes, while wealthier people would have gotten a cupboard and soft furniture as well.⁹⁷

Indeed, the presentation of the bridal dowry and the occasion of the wedding *to’y* repeatedly emerged in my respondents’ narratives as moments at which divisions in wealth could become painfully and publicly apparent. Go’zal Pasilova explained that the Uzbek tradition of laying out the dowry for display to guests before the wedding both made socioeconomic differences visible and reinforced the social meanings attached to certain kinds of consumer goods, especially imports. Furniture given as part of the dowry, she said, “must be precisely either Romanian, or Czech, or German, or Polish, but not Soviet,” in order to be perceived as prestigious. The most coveted Eastern European brand was named “Helga,” leading Pasilova to joke, “It wasn’t the bride that was the main thing, it was ‘Helga.’”⁹⁸ The visibility and comparability of dowries seems to have made them a particular focus for conspicuous consumption in late Soviet Central Asia, and correspondingly a site of personal discomfort among those whose financial constraint was thereby made apparent to friends and acquaintances. Nodira Mustofoeva recalled that her mother (whose own mother had passed away, leaving her in the care of a stepparent) had received a dowry which “was not very good, low quality,” including some “very old” *ko’rpachas*, and had experienced this as a minor humiliation which “affected her life somehow [*kak-to na ee zhizn’ povliiala*].”⁹⁹ Dinara Sultanbekova, whose parents had both died during her childhood (her

⁹⁷ Kokul Chekirova, personal interview.

⁹⁸ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

⁹⁹ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

father as a soldier in 1945, and her mother of illness in 1948), received a small dowry for her 1962 wedding from her uncle and aunt – a chest of drawers, a bed, a cupboard for dishes, and six *zhuurkan* (Kyrgyz-style quilted blankets). While she seemed acutely aware at the meagerness of her dowry compared with that of many others, she interpreted it as an act of nobility and kindness on the part of her relatives, who were themselves not wealthy: “They gave what they could, and for that I thank them.”¹⁰⁰

Asked if there had been a time when she had desired something her family could not afford, Go’zal Pasilova responded by describing the circumstances surrounding her wedding in 1991. Even before the viewing of the dowry, it was a tradition, she said, for members of the groom’s family to visit the bride’s familial home to “see how you were living.” “If everything was good in your home, if you had everything, then they would accept you, they would accept your daughter,” she said. This impending visit became a source of great anxiety for her, being aware of her family’s comparative poverty: “I said to my mother, ‘Mama, we have nothing in our house. There’s only a television, a table and chairs, and a chest of drawers’... We were considered poor. We didn’t have anything that we were supposed to have – ‘Helga,’ or a sideboard, or a hutch.” She begged her mother to borrow money from their wealthier relatives to buy a set of furniture like the one she had seen and admired in the home of her aunt and uncle – “everything identical, a whole set, imported – Polish, or German, or Finnish” – but the attempts to borrow money were unsuccessful. When the groom’s mother and sister came to inspect the house, Pasilova recalled, the lack of the requisite consumer goods did not escape their attention: “Well, my mother-in-law is such a simple woman [*prostaiia zhenshchina*], she didn’t pay that much attention, but [the groom’s] sister paid a lot of attention. She came and looked, and said something like, ‘They aren’t living very well [*ne ochen’ zhe khorosho zhivut*].’ I remember this.”¹⁰¹ Fortunately, she said, her

¹⁰⁰ Dinara Sultanbekova, personal interview.

¹⁰¹ Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

husband himself had grown up living “very simply” in a village in southern Kazakhstan, so that he “didn’t care” and even “didn’t notice that we didn’t have anything.” Nevertheless, Pasilova remembered this pre-wedding visit as an occasion when her family’s inability to afford certain European-style objects, specifically prestigious imported ones, generated social difficulties and embarrassment.

The above examples already make clear that highly charged and somewhat contradictory attitudes toward wealth and poverty seem to have prevailed both among my interview respondents themselves and within the social milieus in which they lived during the Soviet period. It is revealing, though perhaps not totally unexpected in the Soviet context, that both the relatively wealthy and the relatively financially constrained among my Central Asian respondents could evince a considerable ambivalence and even suspicion in their attitudes toward wealth and luxury. Even members of intelligentsia families who, based on their accounts of their consumption patterns, appear to have been at least moderately well-off tended to preemptively seek to deny that their families had been especially wealthy. “By the way, we were not the richest people in Bukhara,” Shoiras Asadova interjected after describing her childhood home’s interior décor. “No – this was a statistically average family.”¹⁰² Ravshan Nazarov described his family’s home as “a sort of standard apartment of the Soviet middle stratum, because the intelligentsia, in the Soviet period, was the middle stratum in terms of its material life.” He later clarified that academics constituted “the lower upper stratum, the lower substratum of the upper stratum.”¹⁰³ Indeed, respondents very frequently evoked intelligentsia membership and “education” as a way of explaining their financial privilege even while disavowing any undue interest in wealth and material possessions. “To this day, when people talk about our family, [they say,] ‘Ah, this is an educated family, *o’qimishli oila* [Uzb.],’” Nodira Mustofoeva explained. “Our family is assessed as an

¹⁰² Shoiras Asadova, personal interview.

¹⁰³ Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview.

educated family. Not wealthy. They don't say we're wealthy [*zazhitochnyi*]."¹⁰⁴ As in Ziyoda Usmanova's account of her principled difference from her former husband, many respondents sought to draw a line between purposeless luxury and pragmatic "convenience" in a way that echoed the primacy of mentalities in post-war Soviet consumption discourses.¹⁰⁵ When her parents acquired a set of Romanian kitchen furniture in 1970, Shoiras Asadova explained, this did not constitute luxury, but mere fulfillment of "the primary necessities – necessities selected with taste."¹⁰⁶ Mustofoeva, as well, denied that her family possessed any particular "wealthy things," but said she had learned from her mother to select "good things... which will serve you for a long time."¹⁰⁷

From the perspective of Central Asians who described living under conditions of financial constraint, manifestations of wealth and luxury during the late Soviet period were greeted with an even sharper moral suspicion. Go'zal Pasilova stated frankly, "I felt that when there was a lot of money, it came from dishonest means." In particular, she expressed disapproval for what she perceived as a popular Uzbek tendency in the 1970s and 1980s to elevate the importance of an impressive and luxurious dowry over any moral concerns: "They weren't interested in how [the family] obtained this wealth. You understand? Whether they stole it, or deceived customers [*obveshivali*], or whether this wealth came from bribes... They were interested in the fact that the bride came, that she received so many clothes, that she had beautiful furniture."¹⁰⁸ Describing her move from a village in Issyk-Kul oblast to the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1976, Kokul Chekirova recalled in particular how "richly" people lived in Osh, a fact which she regarded with both envy and skepticism. People in Osh were able

¹⁰⁴ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁶ Shoiras Asadova, personal interview

¹⁰⁷ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

¹⁰⁸ Go'zal Pasilova, personal interview.

to wear gold jewelry and *atlas* clothing (which she identified as the mark of a wealthy person), she said, because there they engaged in trade at bazaars; in Issyk Kul oblast, by contrast, “nobody traded,” and it was even considered shameful to engage in street commerce.¹⁰⁹ This contempt for trading and commercial lifestyles was, if not causally related to, at least compatible with certain strains of Soviet rhetoric. But here it was woven into locally distinctive social patterns, becoming linked to regional differences within Kyrgyzstan as well as, perhaps, ethnic differences between the predominantly Kyrgyz rural north and the heavily Uzbek-populated city of Osh.

In this sense, Soviet rhetoric in the local-language press regarding wealth and luxury could offer a foothold allowing less wealthy Central Asians to push back against the prestige of expensive imported goods and the classist overtones of the intelligentsia’s high regard for “educated” taste. The descriptor “simple” (Russ. *prostyi*, Uzb. *sodda*), frequently used in the local-language press to describe the unshowy, pared-down aesthetic of Khrushchevian “cultured consumption,” provided the most common term with which Central Asians could present less affluent – and less Europeanized – consumption patterns in a positive light. Salamat Beshimova, for example, described her own manner of dress at university as “simple” and “moderate,” in contrast to “very fashionable” clothing, such as fur coats, that indicated excessive wealth and luxury.¹¹⁰ Dinara Sultanbekova noted that her apartment during the Soviet period had been “very simple,” lacking any expensive or fashionable furniture, but recalled with pride that when an ambulance worker had come to take her daughter to the hospital during a bout of illness in 1981, he had offhandedly commented, “Your home doesn’t have any wealthy things [*bogatstva*], but it’s so clean, so neat!”¹¹¹ Describing how her home had earned such praise, Sultanbekova cited many of the same domestic virtues that were upheld in the Soviet press as

¹⁰⁹ Kokul Chekirova, personal interview.

¹¹⁰ Salamat Beshimova, personal interview.

¹¹¹ Dinara Sultanbekova, personal interview.

prerequisites of “culturedness”: immaculate hygiene, separate storage cupboards for clothing, books, and dishes, and the creation of an environment suitable for raising children. Go’zal Pasilova, for her part, consistently used the term “simple” to sympathetically characterize both people who showed little concern for wealth and material possessions and those who dressed in traditional Central Asian styles. She appreciatively noted that her husband’s grandmother “was very simple,” explaining, “Well, it was the village, they didn’t have anything.” Because he had been raised in these circumstances, she said, her husband had not judged her family for their meager furnishings. Elsewhere, she describes the harassment that “simple women” wearing headscarves and *lozim* would experience on the streets of Tashkent, and recalled that her mother would step in to defend such women from abuse.¹¹² Even while it retained connotations of naiveté and unworldliness, then, the term “simple” could be used in informal discourse to signify a sort of virtuous poverty that bespoke both personal humility and cultural authenticity.

Yet the influence of Soviet discourses, as it turns out, could cut both ways. The unmistakable stigmatization of poverty that many of my respondents observed during the late Soviet period also incorporated elements of official rhetoric and echoed attitudes promulgated in the Central Asian-language Soviet press. To the extent that Central Asians were supposed to manifest both prosperity and “culturedness” by means of the consumption of prestigious European-style goods, as the rhetoric of the Khrushchev era in particular suggested, a peculiar association developed between poverty, uncultured backwardness, and the absence of such material markers of Europeanization. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the call to consume in a “cultured” way in the local-language press at times shaded over into a kind of blanket disdain for rural consumption practices and ways of life, even when they might be attributable to purely economic factors like low collective farming incomes and limited availability of

¹¹² Go’zal Pasilova, personal interview.

goods.¹¹³ The recollections of my oral history respondents, in particular Ravshan Nazarov's and Go'zal Pasilova's expressions of reluctance to wear national-style clothing in Tashkent for fear of being perceived as "provincial," point to a similar way in which urban/rural, wealthy/poor, and European/national binaries were conflated.¹¹⁴ In short, in spite of the Soviet state's suspicion of excessive displays of wealth and explicit authorization of national-style consumption by the Brezhnev-era 1970s, the rhetoric of "cultured consumption" continued to provide a back door through which hierarchies of both class and ethnic expression could be reinforced and woven into one another in the late Soviet period.

The ways in which class, geography, and ethno-cultural difference collided and became entangled in the public (especially urban intelligentsia) discourse of late Soviet Central Asia is starkly illustrated in an anecdote Nodira Mustofoeva relayed from the life of her mother. Though the story is only available in Mustofoeva's second-hand telling, it offers a glimpse of how a self-narrative of personal success and upward mobility could enlist nationality, class, and consumption in the task of formulating a Central Asian intelligentsia identity. When her mother had been a child during the Second World War – "Well, if the war began in 1941, it was until she was 12, 14, 15," Mustofoeva said – she had been forced to sell potatoes on the street to supplement her family's income. "She sat with her sister and sold potatoes," Mustofoeva said. "From four in the morning, they would buy potatoes in one place and sell them in another, for cheap." Finally, in 1945, "an old, grown up man, one of their neighbors, came up and said, 'You won't be selling potatoes anymore. The war is over.'" Mustofoeva emphasized the relief her mother felt at this moment: "To this day she remembers, to her death she remembered this." She eventually received a university education and became what Mustofoeva described as an "elite,"

¹¹³ See Chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ Ravshan Nazarov, personal interview; Go'zal Pasilova, personal interview.

“leading” person in Tashkent society. But even as an adult, her childhood poverty returned to haunt her:

Later, when she was already elite, she was sitting on the tram with all of her friends, and there was this awful woman in *lozim* and a headscarf [*takaia strashnaia zhenshchina, v shtanakh, v platke*]. She called to my mother, ‘Hey, come here!’... And this woman came up, this bazaar seller, and she said, ‘We used to sell potatoes together when we were kids!’ [Laughs.] My mother said, ‘I was so ashamed!’... She was ashamed among her elite girlfriends when this bazaar woman [*bazarskaia zhenshchina*] approached her.

A handful of things are immediately noticeable here. First, in this account, in contrast to Kokul Chekirova’s story of her move to Osh, petty commerce was associated with poverty rather than with wealth, though no less stigmatized as vulgar and shameful as a result. The specter of World War II-era street-selling, presented as a consequence of dire economic need, and the contrasting figures of the “bazaar seller” and the “elite girlfriends” suggests the strong role that class distinction played in the mother’s mortified reaction. Second, it is primarily the woman’s clothing, which Mustofoeva recalled her mother had described as “awful and dirty [*strashnaia, griaznaia*],” and particularly the ethnic markers of *lozim* and headscarf, that are mentioned here to designate her as an outsider to the elite intelligentsia circles that Mustofoeva’s mother occupied by this time. In part, then, the narrative recalls the intense social embarrassment brought about by a breakdown in her mother’s carefully cultivated self-presentation, caused both by the revelation of her former poverty and by being personally associated with such a manifestly “uncultured” woman, lacking the “educated” and “Europeanized” consumer virtues that Mustofoeva identified as integral to her familial identity. On another level, though, the story served to reinscribe this distinction by playing up the contrast in outcomes between the two women’s lives. “She stayed at her level, whereas my mother got out [*vyskochila*],” Mustofoeva concluded. “She didn’t want to remain there.”¹¹⁵ If in some sense this can be read as a familiar narrative of upward mobility and efforts to establish class distinctions through consumption, it also tells

¹¹⁵ Nodira Mustofoeva, personal interview.

an overlapping story in which the trappings of personal success and intelligentsia identity entailed, in part, the shedding of certain, ostensibly embarrassing, ethnic markers or ways of being “Central Asian” – uneducated backwardness, the raucous commerce of the bazaar, the “awful and dirty” traditional-style *lozim*.

The persistent way that class and expressions of nationality were interlinked in the recollections of my respondents may provide a clue to resolving one of the more puzzling mysteries of this dissertation: Why, even as official Soviet rhetoric turned more and more in the direction of an unapologetic advocacy of national-style goods in the 1970s, and moreover as many Central Asians, including members of the intelligentsia, enthusiastically embraced national-style goods in their personal lives, did there nonetheless remain a faint, residual stigma attached to at least some forms of ethnically distinctive consumption in the local public sphere? The answer may lie, in part, with the way in which certain ways of being “national” came to be associated in popular practice with rural life and, by extension, with poverty. It is possible that by the 1960s, the Europeanizing consumption discourse that prevailed in the Khrushchev-era local-language press had acquired something of a life of its own in Central Asian society, becoming inbuilt in class and urban-rural distinctions to the extent that it did not disappear even after official rhetoric stepped decisively away from it during the Brezhnev era. The links between wealth, social prestige, and Europeanization remained too important as an element of Central Asian self-narratives of upward mobility and the self-definition of the intelligentsia to subside entirely. Simultaneously, perhaps, the growing availability and union-wide prestige of Western European goods and styles among the Soviet youth provided a new impetus for the high value on “Europeanness” – though now under a slightly shifted definition – which only reinforced the sense that locally distinctive goods were unfashionable and retrograde.

It should be emphasized, though, that this reassertion of a hierarchical relationship between European and national styles – now enacted more in the social sphere than in official politics – existed in

tension with the processes of geographical and cultural segmentation described earlier. Certain social milieus demanded the performance of “traditionalism,” others demanded the performance of “Europeanness,” and these performances spoke to two distinct sets of cultural values and requirements of prestige, propriety, and belonging. On a local scale, in villages or urban mahallas, the pressures to dress and behave in a traditional manner could predominate, forcing Europeanized Central Asians to (at least temporarily) conform to their requirements. But overlaid on these shifting situational requirements were the subtle but pervasive ways that Europeanness was favored in the region’s formal and informal discourses and in public life – regarded as more prestigious, more modern and advanced, more professionally advantageous. In addition to the lingering effects of Soviet (not to mention pre-Soviet) rhetoric of Central Asian backwardness, this residual pressure toward Europeanization seems to have been connected to the social dynamics of upward mobility, rural-urban migration, and the deployment of European-style objects as tools of conspicuous consumption and social distinction within post-war Central Asian life.

Conclusion

Central Asian consumers’ recollections from the late Soviet period highlight some of the personal and social dynamics of consumption that are either muted or entirely missing in official sources. In particular, they reveal the role of distinctions in class and wealth within local consumer culture and the way that the ideal of “Europeanization” acquired local currency among Central Asians even as state rhetoric retreated from it during the Brezhnev era. It is unsurprising that the question of class emerges especially strongly in oral histories, given the Soviet state’s reluctance to acknowledge the persistence of significant distinctions in wealth and access to goods in the post-war period. More unexpected, though, is the fact that pressure to be more “European” – what many transition-era studies

of Soviet Central Asia used to characterize as the Russifying tendency of local public culture¹¹⁶ – is felt most strongly in the informal sphere, and is indeed difficult to predict at all from the official and press discourses of the 1970s and early 1980s. In other words, the pressure toward Europeanization (or “Russification”) in dress, domestic life, and consumption habits seems to be manifested more consistently and uncompromisingly in day-to-day interpersonal encounters in an urban setting than in the official press or any straightforward prescription from “the state.” This is not to say that these pressures were totally unconnected to the cultural hierarchies that were (or had been in an earlier period) implicit in official Soviet rhetoric. Nevertheless, it appears that a lot of the heavy lifting of establishing and enforcing these norms may have been done on the level of the social dynamics of this urban milieu rather than through more top-down channels – and, moreover, that these pressures did not only originate from the ethnically Russian populations of these cities, but were often being enacted among ethnic Central Asians themselves. If nothing else, then, these interviews indicate how essential it is to examine the social and the everyday spheres in late Soviet Central Asia not merely as a mirror or testing ground for state policy, but as a realm with its own internal workings that had a hand in determining the outcomes of discussions of ethnicity, cultural particularism, and modernity in the region.

If in one sense they pose important qualifications to the late Soviet trend toward greater acceptance of national self-expression, though, in other ways these oral histories represent the culmination of the processes described throughout this dissertation, in which questions about nationality, modernity, and consumption left unresolved or ambiguous in official policy devolved to the level of local taste-makers and finally to everyday social life. In social practice, these ambiguities were amplified and developed into two contrasting stylistic possibilities, which I have summarized as

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone’s foreword to *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), xiv.

“Europeanization” and “traditionalism.” On one level, these styles spoke to distinct cultural commitments and even to distinct geographical milieus within the Central Asian region. Nevertheless, they should not be understood as diverging along the lines of “Soviet” versus “Central Asian” allegiances, with Europeanization representing acquiescence to official values and Central Asian traditionalism representing an oppositional position or even a form of resistance. *Both* Europeanizing and traditionalist modes of consumption were often justified in terms of Soviet rhetoric and ethics – culturedness, modernity, and internationalism on the one hand, and simplicity, humility, and national expression on the other. This fact indicates the expansion of the umbrella of Soviet acceptability by post-war period to include diverse modes of ethnic and cultural expression, but also, simultaneously, the integration of certain Soviet values into local Central Asian discourses and individual self-narratives. This can be understood as a type of cultural integration, in which a wide range of meanings of Uzbekness and Kyrgyznes were presented as compatible with Sovietness, but it was an integration that did not entail homogenization. Both Europeanizing and traditionalist consumption regimes, in their own ways, contested the sole authority of the Soviet state to define the modern consumer ideal, and both diverged from the model on offer in the local-language Soviet press, with Europeanization folding in a greater reverence for novelty, wealth, and Western imports than was officially permissible, and traditionalism referencing locally specific moralities of gender and family.

Finally, these oral histories point to the longer-term outcomes of the discursive and material processes described in this dissertation, extending even into the decades since the dissolution of the USSR. The legacies of the Soviet period remain visible, first, in the self-presentations and terms of identification utilized by my respondents, fashioned both out of Soviet-originated language and out of the material divide between “European-style” and “national-style” objects that was enshrined in Soviet production policy; and, second, in the often neglected question of intra-ethnic social divides in the region, with differences between urban and rural, intelligentsia and non-intelligentsia, Europeanized

and traditionalist Uzbeks or Kyrgyz being grounded to a considerable extent in the differential consumption practices of the late Soviet era. In this way, the examination of post-war consumer culture has the potential to shed light on both the depth of feeling and the complexities that surround ethnicity and national identity in contemporary Central Asian life. If “national cultures” in their local elaboration acquired a certain emotional intimacy and experiential immediacy by the late Soviet period, they also remained shot through with differences in wealth and class, disputes about the expression of ethnic difference, and unanswered questions about cultural allegiances both within Central Asia itself and as part of a broader “European” world.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of consumption shaped both formal and informal discussions about ethnicity, community, and modernity in Soviet Central Asia. This dissertation has traced Soviet discourses about consumption and Central Asian ethnicity as they proceeded from the pinnacles of state decision-making to the complex social dynamics of urban and rural daily life in the region, changing in shape and accumulating specificity and freight along the way. The mass production of Central Asian-style consumer goods within the Soviet planned economy allowed for certain objects of local material culture, conceptualized as an artistic expression of the nation's creativity and unique historical experience, to be legitimated and even valorized as part of daily Central Asian life. The permissible space for ethnic expression in Central Asia grew still broader in the decades after the Second World War, when official fears about the encroachment of Western consumer culture allowed nationality and tradition – even the intermittently stigmatized *Central Asian* nationality and tradition – to be reframed as a counterweight to decadent foreign influences on the youth. Simultaneously, among residents of the region themselves, differential consumption practices enabled by the side-by-side availability of national-style, European-style, and imported goods engendered new lines of intra-ethnic differentiation – generational, cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic. By the Brezhnev-era 1970s, both Soviet policies and local-language discourses allotted Central Asian-style consumer goods a prestigious, highly valued, potentially permanent place in local Soviet society. Aside from acting as visible markers of ethno-cultural particularity, these objects were able to function as building blocks for a way of life that was coded as simultaneously modern, socialist, and Central Asian. Yet far from producing a single homogenous Soviet Central Asian mode of consumption, the loosened reins of the state's political and discursive authority yielded a flourishing of contestation at the local, social, informal level and a diversity of individual and

collective approaches to the problem of being ethnically different within an avowedly internationalist, and increasingly a *de facto* globalizing, late Soviet society.

Soviet national cultures in Central Asia: The persistence of difference and the devolution of interpretive power. Beyond its role in redrawing the boundaries of ethnic identification in Central Asia and folding national symbolism into Soviet power, Soviet nationalities policy recast Central Asian ethno-cultural particularism as a legitimate component of socialist life in the region. For nearly the entire span of Soviet history, the planned economy produced an array of Central Asian-style consumer goods, even as artistic and cultural institutions debated the role of pre-revolutionary Central Asian tradition in “authentic” Soviet national cultures. Over time, the space allowed for Central Asian difference widened to include not only national objects, artistic styles, and modes of consumption, but even distinctive cultural practices and social relationships. The policy of national goods production was initially pinned on the hopes of economic benefits (in terms of export, utilization of local resources, and providing for local consumer demand), but was permanently cemented by a combination of state interest in preserving the “folk art” of peoples throughout the USSR and a particular determination to preserve the material cultures of non-Russian peoples. In contrast to the industrialist and productivist ethos with which the Soviet state is most often associated, cultural thinkers in the post-war period imagined hand-crafted objects of folk art not only as populist, democratic, and national forms of art, but increasingly as a bulwark against the forces of industrial depersonalization, consumerist kitsch, and Khrushchevian homogeneity. Underlying this discourse of folk art were what I am calling the “particularizing” impulses inherent in Soviet nationalities policy. These were manifested not only in active pressures from above for the definition of locally specific objects for each republic of the USSR, but also in a legitimated space for divergence from an all-Soviet, Russian, or European norm, even to the extent of serving repeatedly as a check on policies or discourses that would seek to efface the region’s pre-revolutionary past and cultural heritage.

The robust defense of Central Asian particularism that ultimately became the dominant strain in Soviet discourse in the region suggests that two frequently repeated shorthand understandings of Soviet nationalities policy require, at the very least, serious qualification. First, far from maintaining a rigid distinction between socialist “content” and national “form,” official formulations granted surprising leeway to nationally distinctive practices, mentalities, and even ethical beliefs in a number of realms, including consumption, aesthetics, domestic life, and familial relationships. Unquestionably, core state goals and priorities, from the maintenance of political and economic control to the repression of religion, continued to act as a hard limit on what manifestations of ethno-national distinctiveness were permissible under Soviet rule. But the surprising thing is that by the late 1930s, the state did not opt for the maximalist, broadest possible condemnation of Central Asian cultural content, symbols, and practices on these grounds; instead, and increasingly over time, elements of culture that might have been judged “backward,” religious in origin, or connected to the pre-revolutionary elite were instead reframed as legitimately national. Pre-revolutionary luxury handicrafts were not to be rejected, but appropriated as living art forms and domestic comforts for the laboring masses; the dependent position of the young daughter-in-law (*kelin*) within her husband’s family was not to be condemned as a vestige of women’s subservient position in traditional (Islamic) society, but shored up as a source of tutelary guidance allowing the older generation to educate her in industriousness, humility, and consumerist restraint.

Second, in light of the increasingly exuberant official discourse on Central Asian national objects and art forms by the end of the Brezhnev era, it seems difficult to contend that Soviet nationalities policy was driven by the singular aim, even in the long term, of extinguishing national specificity in favor of a homogenized culture across the entire Soviet Union. Even during the Stalin era, homogenizing impulses coexisted with viewpoints, often most highly developed in “soft-line” institutions of art and culture, that presented cultural diversity not merely as a temporary concession or an evolutionary

stepping stone on the path toward internationalism, but as a wellspring of cultural richness, pleasure, and mutual understanding, and even as a defining feature of Soviet socialism. Soviet internationalism itself, in this latter view, did not signify a utopian “withering away” of nationality, but rather a utopian multi-national community, in which each people would supply great works of culture expressive of its unique history and worldview to facilitate mutual appreciation and “friendship” across ethno-national borders. Moreover, this utopian vision did not remain relegated to the realm of theoretical discussions and optimistic rhetoric. It fueled initiatives which created institutions for the transmission of artisanal knowledge, encouraged study of the principles of traditional design, and invested state funds in the long-term survival of Central Asian methods of hand-craftsmanship. The repeated cries of distress from Soviet artistic professionals about the dying out of old masters and the need to resurrect entire trades suggest that there was nothing inevitable about the survival of Central Asian material cultures and artisanal production into the post-Soviet period. In the context of rising industrialization and the disruptive, at times violent transformations that Soviet power wrought on Central Asian society in the Stalin era and beyond, these objects, practices, and forms of knowledge might have disappeared entirely, were it not for the fact that the state repeatedly took measures to forestall the supposedly “evolutionary” processes that would have pushed them slowly out of existence.

As we have seen, this curious instinct toward cultural preservation in regard to traditional art and material culture – at times even rhetorically framed as a guarantee provided by Soviet nationalities policy and an entitlement of the non-Russian peoples – was not universal within official and professional circles. Soviet nationalities thinking seems to have always contained room for both “Europeanizing” and “particularizing” approaches, perhaps most of all in relation to Central Asian cultures. But in part, this divergence in viewpoints within what I am loosely calling the official sphere – that is, among individuals capable of influencing the practice of state-affiliated institutions or speaking from a position of authority in such institutions – is attributable to how diffuse and decentralized the power to interpret “national

cultures” became within Soviet politics. The problems of administering a large and diverse state – deficiencies in local knowledge and gaps in communication between policy-makers and implementers – were only compounded by fundamental ambiguities and incongruities in the rhetoric about national cultures that was offered at the highest level. Even in the union-wide policies for the development of locally specific “folk artistic crafts” that appeared in the 1930s and again in the 1960s, Moscow-based authorities were almost never involved in defining what those crafts would be, a task which fell to republic-level governments. Less clear still were the questions of how to apply the formula “national in form, socialist in content” to Central Asian material culture and how to define a regime of consumption that was simultaneously national and modern. Individuals at every level were forced to improvise and elaborate on the comparatively skeletal definition of national cultures set down in the letter of Soviet policy, and as they filled in the requisite detail they both pushed outward against its original confines and entangled it with local debates about ethnic difference, gender, family, and consumption.

Beyond underscoring the pivotal role of republic-level officials and ethnically Central Asian cultural elites in defining local national cultures, though, this analysis suggests a need to rethink the ways that historians typically talk about national identities in Central Asia. In short, the set of official policies and Russian-language discourses that constituted Soviet nationalities policy in its strictest sense – the formulation of the categories “Uzbek,” “Kyrgyz,” and so on; the linkage of these categories to particular territories and languages; the state-curated canons of music, literature, art, and (as we have seen in this dissertation) material culture – undergirded but did not exhaust the meanings that these labels held for Central Asians themselves. The language and symbology of this state-originated, ascribed version of nationality indeed seems to have taken hold with a remarkable degree of success, as studies of Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia frequently observe. Soviet discourses of nationality fundamentally restructured understandings of identity and community in Central Asia, not only naturalizing the labels “Uzbek” and “Kyrgyz” and making them ubiquitous but also fostering an

objectified, at least partially externalized, “folkloristic understanding of culture.”¹ Central Asian “national cultures” came to be hinged on and endowed in a discrete set of signifiers, including, as we have seen, folk crafts, clothing, furnishings, and household objects. Yet these “national forms,” pervasive though they were, never existed in a vacuum. Rather than serving as a box within which identities were contained, they became a kind of scaffolding that supported their almost unlimited expansion and elaboration, a peg on which lived experiences of ethnicity and difference could be hung. National consumer goods, in particular, did not serve merely as tokenistic symbols of identity; they were sites of memory, conduits of layered cultural meanings, and material components of a wide array of culturally particularistic practices. The modified *ko’krak burma* dress answered both standards of female modesty and the requirements of female participation in the labor force; Uzbek *ko’rpachas* and the Kyrgyz *zhük* allowed flexibility in the arrangement of the living space to accommodate the reception of family members and guests; the *piyola* lay at the center of a ritual in which the bride served tea to the members of her new family. An understanding of these Soviet nationality categories that solely emphasizes their static nature, their artificiality, and their dependency on the state makes it difficult to convincingly explain why they were – and continue to be – so successful among Central Asians themselves. Their ubiquity is in large part attributable to the action of state institutions, but their affective resonance and usefulness for organizing lived experience depended on the ability of individuals to invest official symbols and ascribed categories with personal meanings.

Consumption, ethnicity, and intra-ethnic divides in post-war Central Asia. In the context of the Soviet state’s production of Central Asian-style goods, consumption served as one of the methods by which individuals could contest and elaborate ideas about Central Asian ethnicity at the ground level, in the course of daily life and social interaction. By the late Soviet period, the landscape of consumer

¹ Mathijs Pelkmans, “‘Culture’ as a tool and an obstacle: missionary encounters in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13: 881-899.

culture in the region was defined by a handful of overlapping processes of ethnic consumption and differentiation. First, individuals might engage in projects of self-fashioning and selective affiliation through the consumption of particular combinations of goods, as in the case of the *stiliaigi* youth and the self-described “Europeanized” urban intelligentsia. Second, from a bird’s-eye view of society, consumption was segmented along geographical lines (usually glossed as the divide between “urban” and “rural”) as well as socioeconomic ones, with “rural” populations consuming fewer European-style goods and the less wealthy strata consuming fewer import goods. But these differences were often not merely factual, but also enshrined in normative expectations and ideas about morality, on the one hand, and culturedness, on the other. The persistence of these parallel normative spheres meant that individuals were often obliged to modify their preferred patterns of consumption in a situational way, changing clothing when traveling from the capital city to a village or maintaining dual dining rooms decorated in “national” and “European” style, in order to speak to differentiated (one might say bifurcated) social and cultural norms within the region. As a result, late Soviet Central Asian consumer culture was defined by the intersection and partial overlap of socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural lines of differentiation. These various axes of difference interacted with and influenced each other in ways that not only created a certain public notion of modern Central Asianness that tended to prevail in the multiethnic urban centers of the region, but also solidified intra-ethnic distinctions. The predominantly urban Central Asian intelligentsia became identified with a Europeanized, import-heavy mode of consumption that could link them to a Soviet-inflected ideal of “culturedness,” but also to wealth and even, at times, to snobbery and deracination. Consumption of a preponderance of national-style goods, on the other hand, could signify, in various combinations, the traits of ruralness, traditionalism in family or sexual mores, cultural authenticity, “simple” humility, tastelessness, or poverty.

On one level, then, consumption became a site where definitions of modernity and Central Asianness were hammered out and put into practice. The task of being Soviet, socialist, or modern and Central Asian at the same time was both a precarious balancing act – one should own a *xontaxta* but cover it with a plastic tablecloth, or one should wear an *atlas* dress with trousers but not with *lozim* – and variable across social and cultural milieus in the region. Individuals learned about, and occasionally pushed back against, the innumerable small rules that governed consumer practice in their particular place and time – the appropriate length for a Central Asian woman’s sleeves, the requisite furnishings for a fully “modern” household, the components of a respectable or prestigious dowry – through a combination of ambient discourses in the Central Asian public sphere, including what was printed in the local-language press, and face-to-face social interactions. On another level, consumer culture was not just a site where these disputes played out, but was in its own right a mechanism that drove them and altered their trajectory. In particular, the “Europeanization” of Central Asia in a material cultural sense, concentrated initially in urban areas and among the intelligentsia but emanating outward from there, cannot be solely chalked up to “Russifying” policies of the Soviet state. It appears, instead, to have been powered to a considerable degree by the engines of consumer culture and governed by the social logic of consumption – specifically, the dynamics of conspicuous consumption and “distinction” in Bourdieu’s sense, in which elites sought to distinguish themselves with particular consumption habits, which then became objects of aspiration for the non-elite.² These aspirational models were, to be sure, already steeped in ideas of civilizedness, culturedness, and ethnicity with the Soviet state as their point of origin and primary purveyor. But it is worth asking whether Europeanization in post-war Central Asia bears as much resemblance to the “irresistible empire” of American cultural imperialism in post-war Europe as it

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

does to the “civilizing missions” of the colonial empires to which the Soviet Union is most often compared.³

Soviet cultural worlds on the periphery. Central Asia’s position on the far periphery of the Soviet Union, both in terms of actual geography and in the imaginations of Moscow policy-makers, has made it a place where historians look for insights into how the USSR exerted power across space – how it functioned, in other words, as an empire.⁴ Typically, discussions of the imperial nature of Soviet rule in Central Asia have focused on the violent confrontations of the Stalin era, when coercive state power could engender something much like anti-colonial movements of resistance.⁵ In these early decades, researchers have found evidence of a deep rift separating the Soviet state and its goals from Central Asian society, where, according to Northrop, the state failed to “overcome the cultural hegemony of non-Soviet ways of seeing the world.”⁶ Yet the case of post-war Central Asia highlights the urgent need for narratives of both regional and Soviet history to extend this discussion of the relationship between center and periphery, between the “Soviet” and the “Central Asian,” into the later period of Soviet rule. There is a need, in particular, to account for the persistent power of the local in another way – not so much as a counter-pole to the power of the centralized state, as it might periodically have been in the 1920s and 1930s, but instead as the arena in which policies, ideas, language, and symbols emanating from the central state were translated, elaborated, and in the process, distended. As we have seen, where the impulses from the center were most ambivalent (or low in priority), as in the concept of

³ Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005).

⁴ This phrasing is modified from Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, who include “a memory of power extended over space” in their definition of empires. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8.

⁵ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Adrienne Edgar, “Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet ‘Emancipation’ of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65/2 (Summer 2006): 252-273.

⁶ Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 169.

“national cultures” itself or the problems of modern youth culture and shifting gender roles, it was most possible, and even most necessary, for local actors to step in to add specificity and substance. Such actors were pivotal in defining, for example, the set of Central Asian-style goods that would be canonized as “national,” the forms that “modern” Central Asian design would take, the meaning of “culturedness” in the context of Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, and the new Central Asian model of gendered dress and family relations. Nor was this merely a case of adding local color or subtly altering the implementation of official policies. It shaped the contours of the Soviet experience, and its long-term legacies, in Central Asia. It created the set of parameters within which Central Asian ethnicity was, and continues in the post-Soviet period to be, regarded as compatible with modernity; it made Soviet power into a pillar that supported certain kinds of Central Asian familial relationships and gender roles; and it set in motion the processes that linked socioeconomic differentiation to urban and rural spaces as well as to cultural identities as alternately “European” or “national.” In this sense, Central Asia’s position on the Soviet periphery must be understood not only in terms of the friction it created and the radical rejection of Soviet norms it at times enabled, but also in terms of the way it permitted the emergence by the 1970s of a cultural and discursive world that was locally distinctive and local in provenance while also being inescapably Soviet.

Exploring the operation of discourses about ethnicity and consumption across multiple registers simultaneously brings into focus the emergence of a contested but shared set of signs, categories, and meanings that could be called, borrowing from Jean and John Comaroff, a shared “cultural field,” or borrowing from William Sewell, a shared “semiotic community” within the late Soviet Central Asian republics.⁷ What these terms have in common, and what makes them particularly useful for describing

⁷ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1997), 27-28; William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 49-50.

the cultural worlds of late Soviet Central Asia, is the room they allow for diversity, multivocality, even radical disagreement alongside and on top of a common set of cultural givens. The term “cultural field,” as the Comaroffs explain, describes “a fluid, often contested and only partially integrated mosaic of narratives, images, and signifying practices.” Likewise, Sewell’s “semiotic community” assumes “only a quite minimal cultural coherence – one might call it a thin coherence,” predicated on a shared set of categories and symbolic oppositions but not necessarily on agreement about the “moral or emotional evaluations of given symbols.”

In the Soviet Central Asian context, this coherence can be seen at the level of a powerful and pervasive set of terminologies (nationality, culturedness, taste), oppositional binaries (European/national, modern/traditional, urban/rural), and subjects of concern (the generation gap, the social responsibilities of consumption, the female body and female dress) that came to structure local and even personal understandings of ethnicity, modernity, and community affiliation in the region. Yet, as Sewell suggests, the pervasive power these categories possessed within local Central Asian discourse did not always entail consensus about their meanings. The ostensible superiority of the “urban” over the “rural” could be turned on its head in satires which linked the Russian, European, or even Soviet influences of the city to moral degeneration and cultural loss. Members of the Central Asian intelligentsia could seek to decouple ethnic Central Asianness from its associations with tradition and with rural life, even displacing it from its position as the antithesis of Europeanness. Short hair on women signified “Europeanization,” but this might mean fashionable beauty, a disruption of conventional gender norms, or a blow to the wearer’s ethnic and cultural authenticity. This shared semantic and symbolic repertoire created a loosely knit but unbroken continuity that extended from discussions taking place in Soviet governing institutions to those in Central Asian villages and mahallas. The “cultural worlds” that developed in this context were both localized and peripheral relative to the Soviet Union as a whole, operating at the level of the republic or, at most, the region as a whole, and

possessing little currency beyond it. They can be described as “Soviet Central Asian” in a way that implies not a juxtaposition of the two terms, nor a some-of-each “hybridity,” but simultaneity, entanglement, and overlap.

How did these Soviet Central Asian cultural worlds come about by the last decades of Soviet rule? On one level, the possibility would not have existed without the increasingly inclusive umbrella of Soviet citizenship that took shape after Stalin’s death. The decades following the Second World War saw a dramatic expansion of the parameters of what was permissible under state auspices, and a corresponding broadening of the meaning of the designation “Soviet” to the point where it became much more capable than before of incorporating Central Asian ways of life. During the same period, the state’s growing anxieties about youth consumerism, the influence of the West, and industrialized modernity created an unintentional affinity between the Soviet values of “culturedness” and “traditionalist” Central Asian values and practices. Central Asian elites, for their part, either stepped into these new spaces of permissibility to elaborate on Central Asian “national cultures,” or adopted and indigenized the Soviet values of “Europeanization” and “culturedness,” wielding them as a form of cultural capital and a tool for intra-ethnic differentiation.

Finally, I would argue, Central Asian languages and Central Asian material cultures each served as a medium through which extra-Soviet meanings and associations were carried into late Soviet life. The local-language press was instrumental in this process, constituting the forum in which Soviet ideas underwent both a linguistic and a cultural translation. The deployment of local parables, set phrases, and value-laden language to expound on Soviet principles necessarily introduced a different set of connotations than existed in their Russian-language formulation.⁸ Objects of local material culture could have a similar effect, carrying with them, as Dmitry Baranov puts it, “the trails of former meaning, a

⁸ Edward Allworth has made this argument in relation to the press’s translation of the Soviet “humility” as Uzbek *kamtarinlik*. Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks From the Fourteenth Century to the Present: A Cultural History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 277-278.

‘metonymic residue’ of sorts.”⁹ Even when it seems to have been the state’s express intention to cleanly excise elements of Central Asian culture from their context, to shear them off from all pre-existing significances – which, I have argued, was far from always the case with national cultures and national goods – these things possessed a kind of stickiness and density of meanings, attaching themselves to other discursive elements and carrying along an unanticipated, invisible payload of connections and implications.

Re-centering our analysis on these peripheral cultural worlds offers a new perspective on the Soviet experience and its legacies, revealing the unexpectedly capacious set of possibilities and practices that not only existed under Soviet rule but were, in large part, enabled and fueled by it. Above all, this perspective has shown that an examination of what is local and what is ethnically and culturally distinctive remains richly productive even in the ostensibly “Sovietized” and homogeneous post-war decades. Central Asia remained a region with its own set of social and cultural trajectories even as it underwent far-ranging and iterative transformations that reworked fundamental understandings of ethnicity and culture and, just as importantly, initiated parallel processes of cultural contestation within the micro-politics of daily life. Soviet ideas joined ideas of local origin as taken-for-granted components of local thinking, becoming, as Comaroff and Comaroff put it, “internalized, in their negative guise, as constraints; in their neutral guise, as conventions; and, in their positive guise, as values.”¹⁰ The result was a sort of cultural integration that, while neither precluding deep cultural divides nor guaranteeing the dominance of official Soviet ideals, must nevertheless be regarded as one of the most significant legacies of Soviet rule in the region. Viewed from the Central Asian “ground,” Central Asianness was no longer imagined in an outsider position relative to Sovietness by the last decades of the USSR, yet this

⁹ Dmitry Baranov, “Archaizing Culture: The Museum of Ethnography,” *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76.

¹⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 22.

was in part because “Sovietness” had come to mean something rather different in Central Asia than it did in Russia.

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