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Ali F. Iğmen

**BUILDING SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA, 1920-1939: KYRGYZ HOUSES
OF CULTURE AND SELF-FASHIONING KYRGYZNESS**

Ali F. Ighmen

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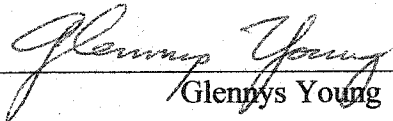
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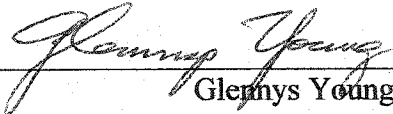
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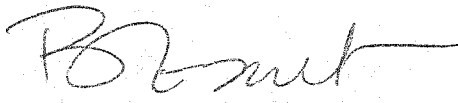
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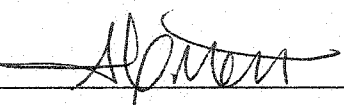
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Abstract

BUILDING SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA, 1920-1939: KYRGYZ HOUSES OF
CULTURE AND SELF-FASHIONING KYRGYZNESS

Ali F. Ighmen

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
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This dissertation is concerned with the ongoing process of fashioning new possibilities for what it meant to be Kyrgyz during the 1920s and 1930s; it analyzes this dynamic development through the prism of clubs. This study examines the discourse in the language of official documents on Soviet club activities and celebrations, such as the Cultural Olympiads, in the expressed sentiments of several Kyrgyz intellectuals, such as actress Sabira Kümüşaliyeva, and in the early fiction of author Chingiz Aitmatov. These artists and intellectuals, who greatly influenced Kyrgyz culture during the second half of the twentieth century, help us frame questions of gender, power and public performance. The narratives of these artists and intellectuals, who first experienced Soviet culture in Houses of Culture, underscore the story that this study draws out of the official government documents. The main method of this dissertation is the analysis of the Soviet discourse of cultural development, conveyed by Soviet institutions such as clubs and Soviet intellectuals in Kirghizia or Kyrgyzstan. It argues that Kyrgyz people who were involved in the cultural activities of the Houses of Culture, Stalinist festivals, Soviet theater, and literature helped make a new Kyrgyz community. Through public performances and artistic expressions, they negotiated Kyrgyzness within the limitations of Soviet citizenship. It suggests that club officials and national talents asserted Kyrgyz culture onto the official Soviet concept of “culturedness.” This study shows that in the 1920s and 1930s, club administrators, theater professionals and Olympiad organizers were encouraged to showcase the ethnic features of their nationalities in the clubs and Stalinist celebrations. These Kyrgyz elites accepted this responsibility and learned to play their ethnicity. They learned to speak the language of the cultural revolution with a Kyrgyz accent. Their national narrative portrayed Kyrgyzness wrapped in a Soviet cloak.

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Transliteration Guide

The Library of Congress transliterates the Kyrgyz language into English via Russian. This causes double transliteration (Kyrgyz to Russian and Russian to English). This dissertation follows the recent trend of transliteration in order to avoid the double transliteration. It follows the standards that Rafis Abazov's recent *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan* established. Here are some examples:

<u>Kyrgyz Letters</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Kyrgyz spelling</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>
Ж	J	Жамила	Jamila
Ү	Ü	Боз үй	Boz üi
Ө	Ö	Ысык Көл	Ysyk Köl
Ы	Y	Кыргыз	Kyrgyz

I chose the following spelling of certain key words:

“Kyrgyz” instead of “Kirghiz”: the Kyrgyz Republic officially accepted the first spelling and the academic community is widely using it.

“Kyrgyzstan” instead of “Kirghizia”: the first term is historically and conventionally more common among Kyrgyz people.

“-yeva” instead of “-eva”: Turkic pronunciation of the names such as “Kümüshaliyeva” calls for this spelling choice rather than “Kümüshaliyeva.”

“Jalal Abad” instead of “Dzalal-Abad”: the first spelling reflects direct transliteration from Kyrgyz to English instead of double transliteration of Kyrgyz words through Russian to English. Also in geographical names, the use of the dash has been dropped from the standard Kyrgyz usage.

A Note on Translations

I have translated the excerpts of Chingiz Aitmatov's work, *akyn* poetry, and most of the Soviet documents from the Kyrgyz and Russian originals. There are several, mostly out-of-print, translations of Aitmatov's work. See the bibliography for details.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CC	Central Committee
CP	Communist Party
CPK	Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<i>Kolkhoz</i>	<i>Kollektivnoe khoziaistvo</i> (collective farm)
<i>Komsomol</i>	<i>Kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi</i> (Communist Youth League)
<i>Kulak</i>	"fist;" wealthy peasant
Kyrgyz ASSR	Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
Kyrgyz SSR	Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic
<i>Narkompros</i>	<i>Narodnyi kommissariat prosveshcheniia</i> (People's Commissariat of Enlightenment)
<i>Oblast</i>	Administrative unit or a province, divided into districts (<i>raion</i>).
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
<i>Sovkhoz</i>	<i>Sovetskoe khoziaistvo</i> (Soviet farm)
TASSR	Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
TCP	Turkestan Communist Party
TOZ	<i>Tovarishchestvo po obshchestvennoi obrabotki zemli</i> (A community association of land cultivation with communally held land and tools)
TsGAKSSR	<i>Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kirgizskoi CCP</i> (Central State Archive of Kyrgyz SSR)
TsKKPSS	<i>Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv pri Tsentral'nom Komitete Kommunisticheskoi Partii CC</i> (Central Party Archive of Central Committee of the Communist Party) and <i>IML pri TSKKPSS (Instituta Marksizma-Leninizma, Marxism-Leninism Institute Archive)</i>
TSSR	Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<i>Zhenotdel</i>	Women's sections of Communist Party organs
f.	<i>fond</i> (collection)
op.	<i>opis'</i> (file)
d.	<i>delo</i> (inventory)
l., ll.	<i>list, listy</i> (folio, folios)

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A large number of advisors, colleagues, friends, and family members in Seattle, Osh, Bishkek, Istanbul, and Bursa made this project possible. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of them. The Departments of History, Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, and the Jackson School of International Studies have provided academic wisdom and financial support for this project. In addition to hiring me faithfully to teach and advise undergraduate students, the History Department helped develop my dissertation project with Maclyn P. Burg, Rondeau Laverne Evans, Andy Studebaker, and Schwartz Awards. My project flourished in Kyrgyzstan and Turkey with the support of Fulbright-Hays, Social Science Research Council, United States Information Agency, and Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships and grants.

Research for this project began in 1995 in Osh, Kyrgyzstan with the generous support from a joint mission of United States Information Agency and Portland State University. I would like to thank Jere Bacharach, Grant Farr, and Marta Colburn for including me in their educational development project in Osh. I am grateful to Ambassador Roza Otunbayeva for helping me obtain my permits. During the course of my nine-month stay in Osh, the President of the Osh State University, Bakyt Beshimov, pampered me and my fresh project by gathering research assistance from graduate students and librarians, and offering an invaluable opportunity to teach a course on Western views of Central Asia. Furthermore, President Beshimov helped me sustain my Russian language skills by introducing me to the best Russian teacher, Flyura V. Akhmedova. I would like to thank Muhtar Irisov and his parents for welcoming me into their family in Osh, and helping me interview the *aksakals* of their clan in Papan.

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Dedication

To my partner Franz F. Goebel

INTRODUCTION

In May 2002, in a tiny village called Akterek, on the southern banks of Ysyk Köl, the largest lake in Kyrgyzstan and a site considered holy to Kyrgyz, I came across a small white building that declared itself, in bold letters, the “club” of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic.”¹ The official purpose of a club, a House of Culture or *Madaniyat Üüü*, in Kyrgyz, was to introduce Bolshevik ideology to indigenous populations through adult education and entertainment. The existence of a Soviet club on this spiritual land seemed striking; the very traditions that considered the lake holy survived many years of Soviet anti-religious “campaigns” to stamp them out.² As I explored the area, I found that every *ail*, town, and city on the lake had a club, each centrally and prominently located, ostensibly displaying the power of the Soviet state and its institutions.³

During a visit to Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, I witnessed that although clubs no longer functioned as they had during the Soviet period, many clubs were still social gathering places.⁴ They often appeared to have been the only Soviet structures ever to grace these wide open spaces. The symbolism of these buildings, like their edifice, had

¹ The clubs were one of numerous Soviet “Houses of Culture,” working along with Lenin’s Corners, Red Corners, Red Yurts, Red Choikhonas, and Women’s Clubs. I use the term “house of culture” as a general term for all of the above listed institutions. The first Workers’ Clubs emerged in 1918 in Moscow to serve the Soviet proletariat as centers of education and “sensible” entertainment. See Gorzka, “Proletarian Culture in Practice: Workers’ Clubs, 1917-1921;” Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers: State, Class and Culture in Moscow’s Worker’s Club Movement, 1925-1928;” Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*; and White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture: Declining State Control over Leisure in the USSR, Poland and Hungary, 1953-8* (See the Bibliography for complete citations for all footnotes.)

² See the photograph of a club on Ysyk Köl (Figure 1) on page 14.

³ In Kyrgyz, *ail* refers to a nomadic encampment, which after sedentarization took on a new meaning: village. (See the Glossary for complete descriptions of all Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uzbek words and phrases.)

⁴ See Ysyk Köl and Osh on the map of Kyrgyzstan (Figure 2) on page 15.

also endured. I learned that villagers were very upset that their club was to be converted to an unrelated government office. Although the villagers no longer used the club, its symbolic power was still strong. This club represented a cultural focal point which all populations came to accept as their own and became a place where Kyrgyz traditions and Soviet art forms merged.⁵

Why and how did Kyrgyz come to see Soviet clubs as their own? After all, the sole purpose of clubs was ostensibly to eradicate so-called “backwards” way of Kyrgyz life. This dissertation is concerned with the ongoing process of creating a Soviet Kyrgyz community during the 1920s and 1930s; it analyzes the making of Soviet Kyrgyzness through the prism of clubs. This study argues that Kyrgyz people who were involved in the cultural activities of the Houses of Culture, Stalinist festivals, Soviet theater, and literature helped the Soviet system fashion Kyrgyzness. Through public performances and artistic expressions, they negotiated Kyrgyzness within the limitations of Soviet citizenship.

The main method of this dissertation is the analysis of the Soviet discourse of “cultural development,” understood as cultural change or cultural revolution, conveyed by Soviet institutions such as clubs and Soviet intellectuals in Kirghizia or Kyrgyzstan.⁶

⁵ See the Cholpon House of Culture built in the 1970s (Figure 3) on page 18.

⁶ I borrow the phrase “cultural revolution” from Michael David-Fox and Sheila Fitzpatrick. David-Fox and Fitzpatrick define this phrase differently. David-Fox has referred to the Soviet twin projects of “fashioning the revolutionary vanguard and the individual revolutionary” and “civilizing and Sovietizing the backward, not yet ‘conscious’ masses as cultural revolution.” He has argued that “revolutionary self-fashioning and the transformation of others were intertwined.” According to this argument, the creation of the revolutionary vanguard and the establishment of cultural missions to create the vanguard overlapped. The vanguard redefined itself in opposition to the less developed factors in society such as the peripheral masses. Similarly, the fashioning of the revolutionary center superseded the development of other sections of society. Furthermore, cultural revolution became so internalized within the revolutionary vanguard that it forced its members to “exorcise” the backwards enemy within. This argument inspired me to adopt the

It examines the discourse in the language of official documents on club activities and celebrations, such as the Cultural Olympiads, in the expressed sentiments of several Kyrgyz intellectuals, such as actress Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva (born in 1917), and in the early fiction of author Chingiz Aitmatov (born in 1928).⁷ These intellectuals, who greatly influenced Kyrgyz culture during the second half of the twentieth century, help frame questions of gender, power, and public performance. The narratives of these artists and intellectuals, who first experienced Soviet culture in these state Houses, underscore the story that I drew out further from the official government documents.

This dissertation is the first study of the Houses of Culture in Soviet Central Asia. It is also the first published source in English on Kümüşhaliyeva's life. Because of my research interest in 1920s and 1930s Central Asia, this dissertation is limited to the pre-World War II era. It does not go so far as to suggest that Kyrgyz citizens shaped the official cultural discourse of the 1920s and 1930s, but it argues that club officials and "national talents" attempted to assert their culture onto the official Soviet concept of "culturedness."⁸

phase "cultural revolution" instead of "cultural transformation." The regional and local documents, reviewed for this dissertation, use the verb *prevratit'* (meaning "to transform") when referring to the official cultural policies and institutions. I prefer the term "revolution" rather than "transformation," because the latter indicates finality instead of a reference to a period of history. See David-Fox, "What is Cultural Revolution?" See Chapter Three for Fitzpatrick's definition of the phrase.

⁷ See the photographs of Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva and Chingiz Aitmatov (Figures 4) on page 17, and (Figure 5) on page 18. For biographical information of Kümüşhaliyeva see Karypkulov, *Chui Oblusu*, 613, for Aitmatov see Kasymov, *Talas Oblusu*, 171-174. (See the Biographies section for all the persons discussed in this study.)

⁸ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*. As Karen Petrone's work has shown within the milieu of state-sanctioned celebrations, Soviet people learned to use these officially legitimized expressions of joy to their benefit. Petrone suggests that celebrations provided a space for both compliance and subversion on the part of the citizens. The Stalinist state fashioned official myths by way of organizing festivals, *dekady* and Olympiads. In turn, the participants of these celebrations helped the state shape celebratory discourse.

It analyzes the foundations and emergence of clubs with the aid of three important sources. It turns first to official government documents such as state regulations and directives, and the reports of the club administrators. My analyses of official correspondence from 1925 to 1941 investigate the impact of the state and local administrators and intellectuals in constructing the Houses of Culture as agencies that guided “cultural development” in Kyrgyzstan.

The second primary source pool, derived mostly from interviews, allows us to examine the emergence of Soviet cultural cadres in Kyrgyzstan. Interviews taken from newspaper articles and my own interviews provide glimpses of the real life stories of various actresses, which illuminate the connections between club education and the emergence of Kyrgyz theater. Kümüşhaliyeva’s story, in the last chapter, provides an invaluable resource for understanding the shaping of Kyrgyz theater. Her experiences also provide an excellent opportunity to examine Kyrgyz women’s role in creating a new Kyrgyz identity in the 1930s and beyond. Kümüşhaliyeva’s account suggests that in encouraging intellectuals like her, the Soviet system helped define twentieth-century Kyrgyz culture.

Finally, the dissertation considers Chingiz Aitmatov’s early fiction as evidence of how a non-Russian writer created a narrative of indigenous Kyrgyz culture in flux. Although there are excellent literary studies on Aitmatov’s work, this study treats Aitmatov’s early writings in a new way; it views his writings as historical texts, and places them in context of cultural revolution in Kyrgyzstan.⁹ Aitmatov published his

⁹ For a list of existing scholarship on Chingiz Aitmatov’s work see Chapter Two. For details on Soviet culture in Kyrgyzstan see Daniyarov, *Kul’turnoe stroitel’stvo v Kirgizskoi SSR v gody dovoennykh*

first short story *Gazetchik Jüyö (Newspaper boy Jüyö)* in the *Komsomolets Kirgizii* newspaper in 1952. He has always seen himself as a historian who thrived when telling the stories of this childhood during the 1930s. His autobiographical and semi-autobiographical early stories, therefore, resemble an oral history experience, peppered with passion and subjectivity. Taking all this into account, I acknowledge Aitmatov's work as a useful depiction of a cultural landscape where Kyrgyz experienced multi-dimensional and multi-directional revolution within their *byt* or *turmush* (everyday life and habits). What is more, Aitmatov's literary contributions helped embed the cultural revolution into the collective memory of Kyrgyz and other Soviet people.¹⁰ Both Aitmatov's early short stories and novellas, and Sabira Kümüşaliyeva's own story of her youth reveal that Kyrgyz intellectuals played a crucial part in creating a discourse of cultural change.

The cultural policies that included the creation of the House of Culture developed while the Soviet administration was trying to establish political power in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹ When the first Soviet club opened its doors in the ail of Kyzyl Kyia in March 1920, Kyrgyz lands were still part of the newly established Turkestan Autonomous Soviet

piatiletok; idem, *Osushchestvleniie Leninskoi programmy kul'turnoi revoliutsii v Kirgizii*; idem, *Stanovlenie kirgizskoi sovetskoi kul'tury, 1917-1924 gg.*

¹⁰ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Wertsch has suggested that the influence of language and narrative texts, or what he called "cultural tools," should be taken seriously as powerful producers of histories. He has argued that "collective remembering" is a mediated action that is both social and dynamic. I agree with Wertsch that textual resources such as club documents and Aitmatov's short stories provide those who are remembering a social position and perspective. Kümüşaliyeva also provides a narrative that belongs to the people who participated in making Kyrgyz cultural history in the Soviet period.

¹¹ The first Workers' Clubs emerged in 1918 in Moscow to serve the Soviet proletariat as centers of education and sensible entertainment. The first Kyrgyz amateur musical-drama circle called "Freedom" (*samodaeatel'nyi muzykal'no-dramaticheskii kruzhok "Svoboda"*) in 1918 in Frunze.

Socialist Republic.¹² In October 1924, when the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous *Oblast* became a separate entity under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, there were thirty-five clubs in Kyrgyzstan.¹³

Clubs were one of numerous cultural institutions that sought to change Kyrgyz culture during the 1920s and 1930s. In the beginning of the 1920s, Turkestan *Narkompros* issued regulations that dictated how the new cultural institutions should be run.¹⁴ The Commissariat designed the club building (called a Red *Choikhona* among the Uzbeks, akin to a traditional Uzbek teahouse, or a Red Yurt for Kyrgyz) as a place for people to spend their leisure time.¹⁵ The earliest clubs began to take over and replace traditional choikhonas or *boziii* (yurts).¹⁶ The low-key and friendly atmosphere of an Uzbek choikhona would change into that of a more official Soviet club; stern Soviet posters would accompany or replace colorful and flowery Uzbek decorations, creating a stark environment. Another irony emerged from a linguistic peculiarity. *Boziii*, the Kyrgyz word for yurt, meant “gray house,” depicting the unassuming color of the felt that covered the yurt; the awkward phrase “crimson gray house” must have accentuated the alien quality of this new institution. Nonetheless, Kyrgyz club members decorated their

¹² The Russian Empire’s expansion into neighboring Turkic and Muslim regions of began in the sixteenth century and the Tsarist Empire finally defeated the Central Asians in the nineteenth century. In March 1865, the imperial administration created the Turkestan Oblast which included the territories between the Aral Sea in the west and Ysyk K l in the east (a total of 1,738,928 square kilometers, with a population of five to seven million).

¹³ Ibraimov, *Kyrgyzstan Entsiklopediya*, 311.

¹⁴ *Narkompros* means *Narodnyi kommissariat prosveshcheniia* (People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment). See the Glossary for details.

¹⁵ *Choikhona* means teahouse in Uzbek (*chaikhana* in Kyrgyz). See the Glossary for details.

¹⁶ See a *boziii* (Figure 6) on page 19. This word refers to a yurt. See the Glossary for details.

bozïi with colorful felt wall-hangings such as *ala kiiz* or *shyrdak* (two types of Kyrgyz felt carpets) to bring some warmth to them.¹⁷

Clubs were primarily intended to provide venues for revolutionary education. Numerous state documents referred to the “idle Central Asians” as backwards populations waiting to be reformed.¹⁸ The Commissariat proposed that effective reforms could only be instilled by educating adults and expected the clubs to stage activities, such as “readings” (for example, a literate member reading the newspaper out loud for the illiterate majority) and short plays, to support the party in the political and cultural education of adults. Club administrators often preferred theater to take “center stage” because it simultaneously entertained and educated the club members.¹⁹

Clubs, schools, pioneer organizations, the *Komsomol*, *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* activities, local history museums and other social and cultural institutions all attempted to define the indigenous populations in Kyrgyzstan and give them a new identity that was suitable for a Soviet people.²⁰ Along with other educational and cultural institutions, clubs gave the children of Kyrgyzstan their first taste of Russian and other Western arts. Famous artists, such as the writer Aitmatov, and the stage and film actress Kümüşhaliyeva, emerged out of the Western artistic tradition that clubs and other institutions introduced. Having their first formal art lessons in clubs, these Kyrgyz artists

¹⁷ For details on Kyrgyz art, see Dyadyuchenko et al., *Kyrgyz Oimoloru*. See *ala kiiz* and *shyrdak* (Figure 7) on page 20 and (Figure 8) on page 21.

¹⁸ The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic, June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 1417, ll. 70-72.

¹⁹ Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, Vladimir I. Lenin's spouse, saw the Soviet Club as a new home for the people and a laboratory for development of collective opinion. Lenin believed that cultural and educational reform in Worker's Clubs would give birth to a new sphere for people's collective initiative and creativity.

²⁰ See the Glossary for the definitions of these terms.

eventually brought their own interpretations to Soviet art. The records of these artists demonstrated that they took the word *madaniyat*, from which Uzbek and Kyrgyz clubs derived their name, at its face value. *Madaniyat* means “civilization” rather than culture. My primary sources show that administrators and members of clubs began to see these “Houses of Civilization” as their ticket to becoming “modern.”

The activities of club managers, festival organizers, actors and authors show both the practice and evidence of how they worked toward a so-called “modern” culture. Making Kyrgyz culture “modern” was not an entirely new concept for these Soviet government agents and activists; they had inherited it from their pre-Soviet predecessors.²¹ The commissars and other high-ranking officials sent out directives and reports to ail clubs expecting the administrators of clubs, regional theaters and festivals to implement cultural and educational activities. In so doing, high-ranking administrators ordered their regional and ail subordinates to execute cultural activities that furthered the Bolshevik ideology in their regions. Regional and ail club administrators, on the other hand, viewed these new cultural institutions and activities as providing opportunities for cultural development and for the improvement of cultural knowledge. This difference in understanding originated from the official correspondence written in the particular language of the Bolsheviks that called for “cultural development.”

²¹ Stein, *Making Jews Modern*. Stein has described the term “modern” the way in which Russian and Ottoman Jewish societies of the turn of the century saw it. Stein has shown that when Yiddish and Ladino presses of these late empires used the term “modern,” they signaled discontinuity with the past and engagement with the future. So-called images in these presses illustrated that their societies needed to adopt new ways of education their societies. The meaning of modern in Soviet Kirghizia was not far from these images. Similar to these Jewish presses’ promises of new possibilities, Kyrgyz club administrators offered opportunities for a new and modern future.

In official Soviet discourse, the modern concept of *kul'turnost* or culturedness integrated the development of arts and literature and everyday life and manners.²² This concept encompassed “civilized” behavior and rejected “primitive” ways of living, such as the Kyrgyz *eldin turmushu* (Kyrgyz way of everyday living) in nomadic encampments.²³ Kyrgyz intellectuals of the Stalinist era such as Kümüşaliyeva and Aitmatov internalized this new culture. In their lives and work, however, they showed that crucial aspects of Kyrgyz values endured. Their expressions of Soviet citizenship and artistry reshaped their traditions to reflect the contemporary trends of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. An example of this representation is the prominence of the heroes and heroines of Kyrgyz oral literature in the performances of the Kyrgyz National Theater, including that of Kümüşaliyeva. In his short stories and novellas, Aitmatov also celebrated Kyrgyz *kaada salt* or *salt* (codes of conduct for everyday habits and customs) such as reverence for the elders and the natural environment.

Existing studies do not sufficiently address the influence of Kyrgyz people on their region’s cultural institutions during the first half of the Soviet Era. The scholarship on Kyrgyz culture of the Soviet Era fails to provide satisfactory analyses of the Houses of Culture. It does not scrutinize the relationship between the Houses of Culture and the construction of Kyrgyz identity or the negotiation of fashioning “Kyrgyzness;” instead, they convey the success stories of the Houses of Culture and Soviet celebrations

²² For definitions of “culturedness,” see Volkov, “The Concept of *Kul'turnost*”; Hoffmann and Kotsonis, *Russian Modernity*; Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*; Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*; idem, *Everyday Stalinism*; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

²³ For a discussion on Soviet ethnographers’ evolutionary views on so-called “primitive” societies, see Gellner, *State and Society in Soviet Thought*. Also on Soviet studies of Muslim social life see Abramzon, *Kirgizy i ikh etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi*; Basilov, *Kul't sviatykh v Islame*; Snesarev and Basilov, *Domusul'manskie verovaniia i obriady v Srednei Azii*.

uncritically without any analysis of their activities.²⁴ More specifically, an analysis of how club administrators contested or cooperated with regional directives is missing from this scholarship. Similarly, the extant scholarship on Kyrgyz Theater and other performing arts of the Soviet Era in the republic rarely touch upon the role of Houses of Culture in the development of performing arts, specifically theater.²⁵ There are only limited analyses of how Soviet cultural policies created a Kyrgyz identity.²⁶ These analyses depict a stable, somewhat stagnant view of Kyrgyzzness. In summary, existing scholarship has not adequately acknowledged the ways in which the recipients of official policies engaged with these policies and has largely ignored the participants of Soviet cultural policies as agents of contestation and influence.

This study investigates ways in which the members of Kyrgyz Houses of Culture and artists, such as Kümüşhaliyeva and Aitmatov, played a role in creating a new culture in Kyrgyzstan. It also considers ways in which Kyrgyz discarded or preserved their pre-Soviet traditions while participating in the creation of this new culture. Clubs, people's theaters, and other houses became venues where stars-in-the-making learned to respond to the state's educational and ideological requirements while nurturing their own creativity. Similarly, the stories of Aitmatov provided fictional role models such as the

²⁴ Historian S.S. Daniyarov has published a number of valuable books on the development of Kyrgyz culture during and after the Bolshevik Revolution. Daniyarov's interests have been broad, but his work has not fully addressed the significance of the Houses of Culture where all populations provided their own interpretations of so-called Soviet art.

²⁵ For Russian-Kyrgyz Theater see Brudnyi, *Iz istorii russko-kirgizskoi literaturnykh i teatral'nykh svyazei*.

²⁶ The only in-depth analysis of Kyrgyz culture that exists is on Kyrgyz oral literature and the epic of *Manas*. This literature has been invaluable in locating the role of oral tradition within the development of modern Kyrgyz performing arts. It asks critical questions regarding the role of *Manas* and other oral epics in the development of Kyrgyz identity. This literature illuminates why the Kyrgyz place such importance on the *Manas* epic as their guidebook for life, but, in this literature the contribution of Houses of Culture has been mentioned only in passing, without any analysis of their crucial role as the mediators, and providers of a place where *Manas* is performed or discussed. For a list of scholarly literature on *Manas* see Chapter One.

influential Soviet heroine Jamila or the revolutionary teacher Dūishön.²⁷ When Kyrgyz youths read these heroic stories at school, they began to construct national role models in the image of these socialist heroes.

There are several scholarly debates that inform the foundation of this dissertation. First, scholarship on imperial Russian, Soviet and Central Asian cultural studies directly or indirectly addresses the development and demise of Soviet institutions such as Houses of Culture. The second body of scholarship focuses on the nature of the Soviet nationalities policy.²⁸ Finally, the background of imperial Russian and Soviet approaches to non-Russian, Muslim and nomadic Kyrgyz is essential to this study and I therefore turn to the scholarship on Russian Orientalism and colonialism, and the Soviet treatment of non-Russian nationalities, which, in particular, inform my analyses of identity formation and gender issues.²⁹

This study adopts a definition of culture offered by a diverse group of anthropologists and cultural historians. It understands culture, specifically Kyrgyz, as a collective code of beliefs, knowledge, and values that the people of Kyrgyzstan possess.³⁰

²⁷ See the lithographs of L. A. Il'ina, depicting Jamila and Dūishön (Figure 9) on page 22 and (Figure 10) on page 23. See, Aitmatov, *Jamila*. In 1959, Aragon described *Jamila* as the most beautiful love story ever written. See Aragon, "Samaia prekrasnaia na svete povest' o liubvi;" and also see Aitmatov, *Dūishön (Pervii Uchitel')*.

²⁸ Mark Von Hagen has recently reviewed the scholarship on Eurasian history (in both the pre- and post-Cold-War era). Von Hagen has concluded that the post-Cold War era scholarship that forms an emerging Eurasian anti-paradigm whose fundamental analytical assumptions are in opposition with the old paradigms of Russia/Orient and Soviet Union/modernization. He has suggested that the new scholarship has moved away from such paradigms and rendered Eurasian studies as an anti-paradigm, freeing the subject from modern nation-state borders. For more see Von Hagen, "Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era."

²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*: 1. Edward Said describes *Orientalism* as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience."

³⁰ As William H. Sewell Jr. has described the definitions of culture, this is a definition of "culture as a concrete bounded world of beliefs and practices," not as a theoretical category. For more see Sewell Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture."

This dissertation focuses on the significance of Kyrgyz traditions and lifestyles in building the new Soviet culture. To this end, I analyze the discourse embedded in the language of official documents and in the practice of cultural revolution. I define “discourse” as the product of written or spoken texts which, in turn, takes on a life of its own and creates a new reality.³¹ This study finds two types of discourses.³² The first discourse emerges from the correspondence of Soviet authorities and in Aitmatov’s early prose; the second discourse emerges from my oral interviews with Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva and others. My analysis of these two discourses acknowledges that there was a constant tension between them as both attempted to assert their own understanding of Kyrgyzness during the 1920s and 1930s.³³

Most importantly, in referring to revolutionary times, my definition of “discourse” is an attempt to demonstrate how political correspondence, selected fiction, and life stories influenced the fashioning of Soviet identity in Kyrgyzstan. For this, I rely on Lynn Hunt’s notion of “revolutionary discourse.” Hunt has pointed out that assuming that diverse discursive expressions of revolutionary actors constitute a single “text,” revolutionary discourses “establish new fields of social, political, and cultural struggle.”

The creation of clubs, theater and festivals was an ideological act that aimed to establish a single text or discourse called cultural revolution in Soviet Kyrgyzstan. But it

³¹ For definitions of discourse and “revolutionary discourse” see, Foucault, *The Order of Things*; idem, *Discipline and Punish*; Said, *Orientalism*; and Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Following the definitions of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, I propose that a discourse emerges out of an authoritative text, such as my sources and creates a new reality.

³² For external and internal discourse, see Raleigh, *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, and *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War: Politics, Society and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922*.

³³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. M.M. Bakhtin’s definitions of “authoritative” and “internally persuasive” discourses inform my interpretations of Soviet power (authoritative) and a Kyrgyz individual’s agency (internally persuasive).

also included a discourse to fashion a contemporary Kyrgyz culture, which the Bolsheviks viewed as a step toward “raising the Kyrgyz” to the level of the European peoples of the Soviet Union.



FIGURE 1: A club on Ysyk K l, source: my own photograph.

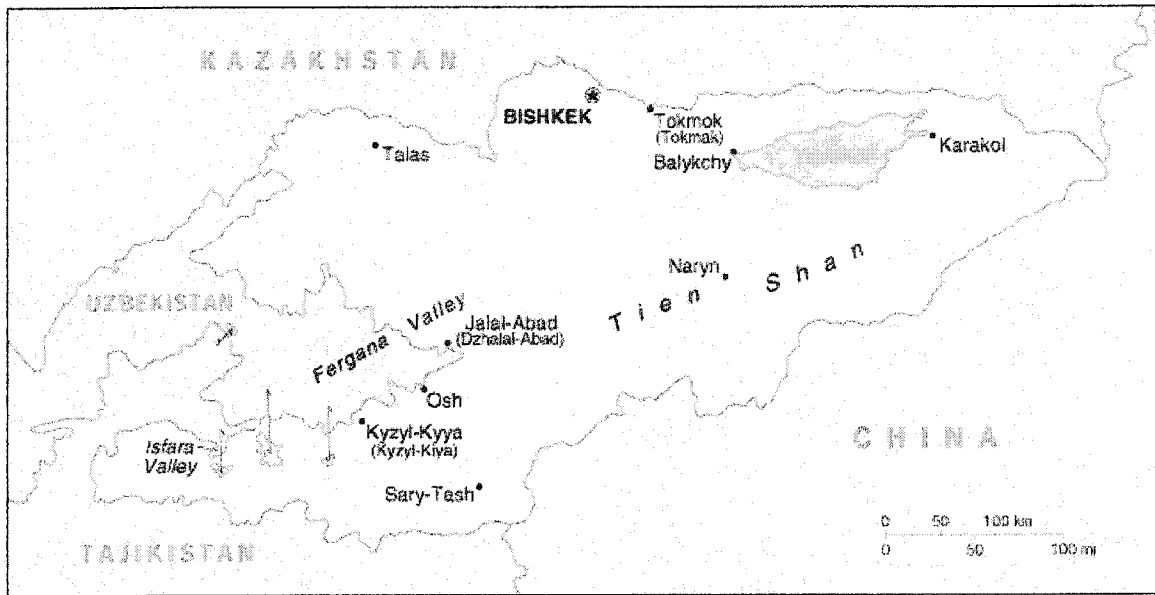


FIGURE 2: Map of Kyrgyzstan.



FIGURE 3: The Cholpon House of Culture, source: my own photograph.



FIGURE 4: Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva in 2002, source: my own photograph.

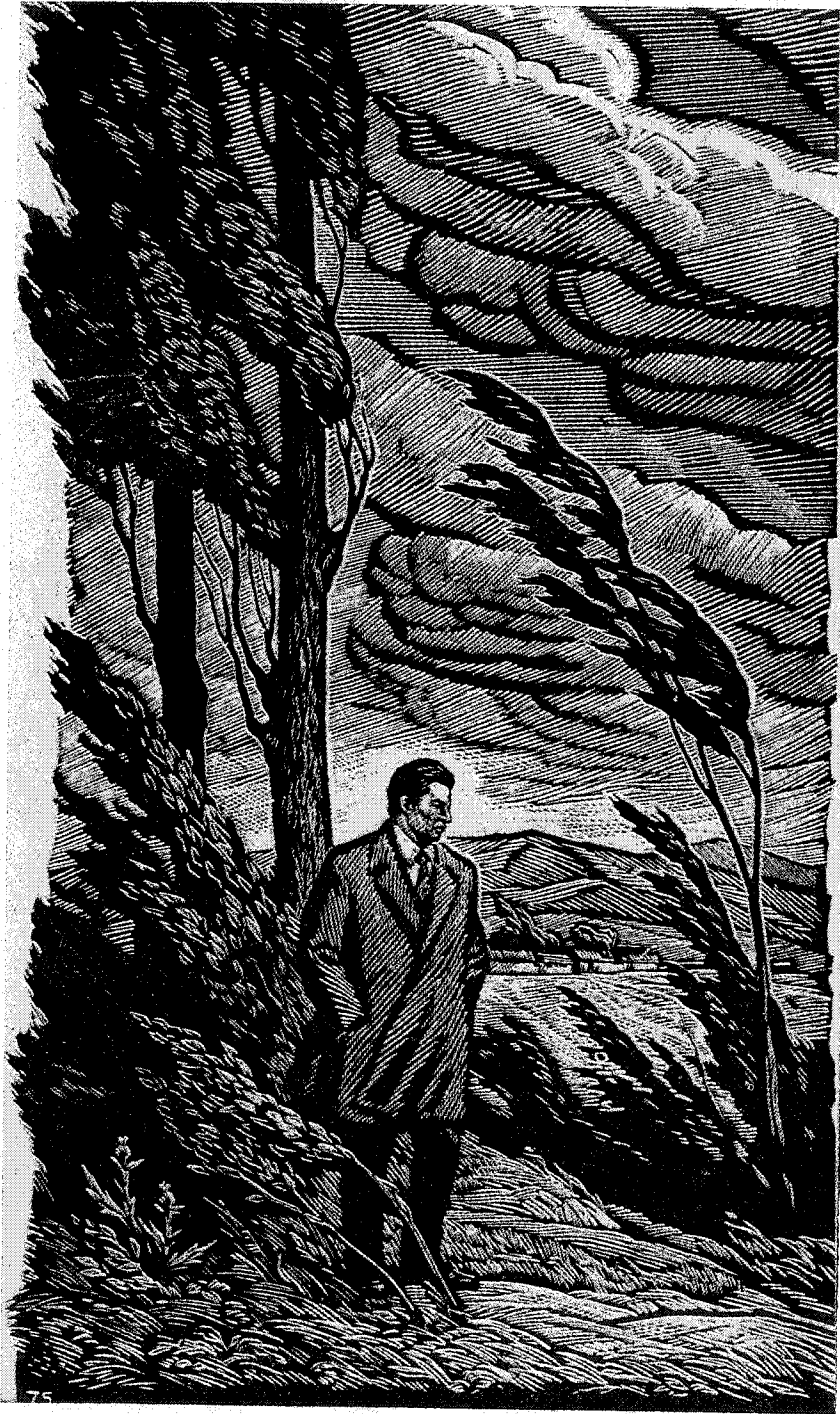


FIGURE 5: Chingiz Aitmatov in an A. C. Ostashev lithograph, 1975.



FIGURE 6: A Bozui in Osh, source: my own photograph.



FIGURE 7: *Ala kiiiz*, source: *Unesco Central Asian Intangible Heritage Network*.



FIGURE 8: *Shyrdak*, source: www.Kyrgyzstan-cbf.org



FIGURE 9: Jamila in an L. A. Il'ina lithograph, 1976.



FIGURE 10: Dūishōn and his students in an A. S. Ostashev lithograph, 1970.

CHAPTER ONE

“ASIATIC” SUBJECTS OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

The Bolsheviks inherited the images of “Asiatic” Kyrgyz and Uzbeks from their imperial predecessors. These predecessors who concerned themselves with Central Asia included tsarist government officials, Russian intelligentsia, writers, artists, and their Turkic counterparts. This chapter argues that the Bolsheviks inherited the images of the “Asiatic,” including that of Kyrgyz, and explores the ways in which the elites created and contested this image. It suggests that the images that emerged were by no means constant; on the contrary, the Bolsheviks took over the governance of populations whose official communities they recognized as volatile.

The official meaning of Kyrgyzzness and Uzbekness was always changing. These communities were in flux, in the period since Catherine the Great (the annexation of Crimean Tatar Khanate in 1783) and especially in the last thirty years of the imperial period. The Bolshevik cultural policy-makers often drew upon the definitions their predecessors laid out when describing Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and other Central Asian peoples. The Bolshevik understanding of Kyrgyz and Uzbek cultures, therefore, requires an analysis of imperial Russian definitions of so-called “Asiatic” cultures.

In this chapter, I examine the primary and secondary literature on the “Orientalist” views of late imperial Russia. First, I revisit the works of well-known Russian literary figures in order to tease out how they defined the “Asiatic.” Second, I analyze various secondary sources for historical background on imperial treatment of its “Asiatic” subjects. Third, I turn to Russian and Turkic elites and thinkers in order to

understand how they attempted to definite modern Russian and Turkic communities.

Finally, I bring in Kazakh and Kyrgyz thinkers in order to examine their contribution and response to these new trends of redefining the meaning of “Asiatic” in a changing world.

The Bolsheviks talked and wrote about the “improvement” of amateur talents among Kyrgyz and Uzbeks as one of the main goals of their Houses of Culture. An analysis of their discourse helps clarify the Bolshevik concept of amateur talent, as well as the meaning of change, which, in turn, explain the “official” meaning of improvement or development. For example, in addition to the definitions of “improvement” and “development,” the Bolshevik documents under review liberally utilized the term “cultured,” which elucidates what is meant by “ignorance” and “education.”

Transforming people’s communities was the fundamental concept in the culture-making language of Soviet clubs. The concept of “cultural transformation” was absolutely necessary if the new Soviet state and the Soviet nation were to be considered developed. Some Bolshevik cultural revolutionaries, like their Westernizing predecessors, saw the concepts of culture and development in the context of the Western European world.¹ Being aware of the economic and social achievements of capitalist Western Europe, Lenin and his revolutionary comrades believed that backwards Russia needed to improve its culture to reach a higher stage of development. Marxist ideology provided the blueprint of cultural development for Russia, which was, the Bolsheviks

¹ Note that not all Bolsheviks saw the West as their main point of emulation. Some, following in the footsteps of their Slavophile predecessors, believed in reviving the “Russian soul” while introducing modernity.

admitted, well behind Western Europe.² Most cultural models that symbolized modernity came to Russia from the West and pre-dated the Bolsheviks by decades, if not centuries.

Scholarship on modernity in Russia has always emphasized the differences between West and East, scrutinizing Russia's place in "Enlightened" Europe. Russia's encounter with modernity had a specific character, according to scholars of Russian and Soviet history.³ Western-oriented Russian intellectual discourse perceived European Enlightenment, nation-state formation, and the development of civil society as representative virtues of modernity. Indeed, Western-oriented imperial Russian leaders and elites saw modernity as a product of the West, and their interpretations gradually created a type of modernity that reflected Russia's physical and cultural location in the world. The same group targeted illiteracy and questioned the ambiguous boundaries between Russia's ethnic groups. They had reservations about the autocratic behavior of the Russian state, suggesting that it could not allow civil society to emerge fully.

Turkic and Muslim thinkers who sought to modernize Russian society also expressed these concerns. Late imperial rulers and thinkers (Russian and non-Russian) wanted to create a Russia that did not fall behind Europe, but at the same time kept its "distinct" character. Russia's concept of their nation's distinctive character informed their approach to modernity. As Anthony Giddens has argued more generally,

² For the Western influences on modern Russian and Soviet cultural ideas and policies, see the introductory essays in Kelly and Shepherd, *Russian Cultural Studies*; and Rzhevsky, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*; and Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism*.

³ For a chronologically organized and in-depth discussion on Russian modernity, see Hoffmann and Kotsonis, *Russian Modernity*; and Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks," 384-424.

individuals often learn to negotiate the terms and requirements of modernity with the state and the society and internalize it in ways that seem real to them.⁴ In this way, too, Russian and Turkic thinkers rendered modernity relevant for their own needs and culture.

Imagining the Turkic and Muslim Peoples

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian literature of the imperial period provided its readers with exotic, erotic, heroic and brutish, almost other-worldly images of non-Russians, including the Turkic or Muslim peoples of the empire.⁵ Along with the imperial ethnographers and travelers, this literature influenced the Soviet view of Kyrgyz and other Turkic people.⁶ The novellas and poetry of the late imperial Russian literature constructed powerful images of the non-Russian as an exotic alien, which readers often

⁴ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*.

⁵ Brown, *A History of Russian Literature of the Romantic Period*. According to Brown, Russia's principal drama writer in the Romantic period, Vladislav Aleksandrovich Ozerov (1769-1816) typified the romantic era in Russian Literature. The subject of Ozerov's first successful drama *Dmitrii Donskoi* was the Kulikovo battle between Dmitrii of the Don and Mamai of the Tatars. Ozerov wrote that the Prince of Muscovy, Dmitrii, delivered his people from "the hated Tatar Yoke" and "dreaded Mamai, general of the Golden Horde." Brown suggested that the play was very successful due to its timeliness; the play was first staged in 1807, during the second Napoleonic War, and thus, it appealed to the patriotic feelings of the Russian people. Brown deduced that Dmitrii represented Tsar Alexander I, and Mamai represented Napoleon. The depiction of the "Other" as the Tatar was so potent and eternal that the representation of the new enemy proved to be stronger in the embodiment of the Tatar as an age-old invader. There are other illustrations of reviving an old enemy to represent the new in the literature of this period, such as Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Shakhovskoi's (1777-1846) comic opera *Kerim-Girey, Khan of the Crimea* (1825).

⁶ Semin, *Sevastopol': Istoricheskii ocherk*, 24. I owe the following reference to Susan Layton. Catherine the Great (1729-1796), in addition to being an extraordinary ruler, was a prolific writer. In her work titled *Prince Khlor*, she told the tale of a Kievan Tsar who was kidnapped and raised by "Kirgiz Tatars." In contrast to earlier Russian epic tales and other writings, Catherine the Great composed an exotic image of the "Other." She was sympathetic towards her foreign fictional characters and curious about their unfamiliar culture. Catherine annexed the Tatar Crimea in 1783 and later reflected on her impressions of this foreign land. She evoked the image of exotic Crimea during her visit and associated the Muslim Crimean Tatars with Muslim Arabs. Layton has pointed out that Crimea was the first territory to acquire "an aura of eastern exoticism" before the Caucasus "upstaged its rivals in oriental domain." In effect, Catherine altered the negative portrayal of the non-Russian and the non-Orthodox and replaced it with a mysterious image. Perhaps, impressed by her view of the non-Russians, the writers Iermil Ivanovich Kostrov (1750-1796) and Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816) wrote about Catherine the Great as the exotic "Kirgiz-Kaysak Princess Felitsa." See Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature*; Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*.

took as fact.⁷ This depiction of exotic stranger or outsider was rarely specific to one non-Russian group and included Tatars, Bashkirs, Yakuts, Kalmyks, Cossacks, and Mongols.⁸ In addition, the image of the Turk or the Ottoman regularly appeared in the “Orientalist” writings of the Russian Romantics. In fact, Russian Romantic writers often confused the ethnic designations given to or adopted by other people. For example, a Tatar character would be sometimes called a Mongol, other times a Turk. Consequently, these writers established a powerful stereotype about non-Russians that lasted well into the twentieth century.⁹ Understanding the way in which the Russian Romantics wrote about the outsider it opens a new window onto the Soviet discourse on reforming non-Russians.

Among all the writers of the Romantic period in Russia, Aleksander A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii stands out as a striking representative of Russian “Orientalists.” After his participation in the Decembrist uprising, Marlinskii (1797-1837) was exiled to Yakutiia. Later, Tsar Nikolai I allowed him to relocate to the Caucasus, where he wrote two novels and eventually died.¹⁰ His novels *Ammalat Bek* (1832) and *Mulla-Nur* (1839) exemplified the Russian literary fascination with the magnificent mountains and vistas of the Caucasus. Most importantly, the Caucasus was said to be full of exotic people, whose languages and traditions were extremely foreign and attracted Marlinskii and other Russian writers such as Aleksander Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837), Mikhail Petrovich

⁷ Said, *Orientalism*; and Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, 355-431.

⁸ See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*.

⁹ Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 15. According to Greenblatt, there is a hierarchy of knowledge which is closely connected with generating and enabling a hierarchy of power. These conventions or clichés, consequently, constitute reality.

¹⁰ Brown, *A History of Russian Literature of the Romantic Period*. 125.

Lermontov (1814-1841), and Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910). Susan Layton has emphasized that during his life in the Caucasus, Marlinskii cultivated a soldier's personality for himself while portraying the enemy leader Gazi-Muhammed as a fanatical Asian leader. She has argued that Marlinskii often blurred the identity of his characters as he did with Muslim Gazi-Muhammed, who was said to be a son of a Russian anti-tsarist officer. Such a dual characterization is typical of Marlinskii's portrayal of the region. Layton has provided an excellent analysis of how Marlinskii gave a dual character to his "Orient." The "Orient" was a place where extraordinary "Asiatic" people lived who were to be both admired and feared.¹¹

Did Russian Romantics devise these "imagined" portraits of non-Russians or did they simply convey what they observed?¹² In a Russian novella the depiction of a Tatar as "a wild savage," for instance, served both a fictional purpose and created an indelible image of the Tatars. This derogatory designation may have seemed historically realistic to the Russian writers for they may have considered Tatar ways of living as "wild." More importantly, these writers help to objectify and often marginalize the so-called "savage" Asian as an aberrant component of Russian society.¹³

Russians constructed an image of self vis-à-vis their image of the wild barbarian (Tatar, Cossack, and Kyrgyz). For example, the Mongol and the Turk had historically represented the enemy who was intellectually inferior but physically more powerful. In this case, Russians were the victims and wild savages the oppressors. This simple concept took a more sophisticated form in the works of later Russian Romantics such as

¹¹ Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*, 110-132.

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-6.

¹³ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 16.

the painter Vassily Vereshchagin, who brought more complexity to the images of Turkic and Muslim peoples. Their visual depictions blurred the lines of savagery and gallantry. Vereshchagin's paintings did not assign "civilized" heroism solely to Russian troops; in his 1874 exhibit in St. Petersburg, he showed both the Russian and Turkestanian soldiers in the imperial Turkestan campaign as fighters defending their countries. Vereshchagin's view of the massacred Tekke Turkmens (1881) is further illustrated in a comment Vereshchagin made to a friend noting that his work underlined the senselessness of the Imperial War and that both the Russians and Turkestanis "prayed to the same God."¹⁴ Examining Vereshchagin's work, Orlando Figes has argued insightfully that Russia's artistic elites such as this painter created a mythical image of Asia and Asians and found Asian roots in Russian ancestry. The imperial military used this perceived ancient connection to justify the colonial advances deeper into Central Asia. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in 1881 that Russia must use its military successes in Central Asia to begin a "civilizing" mission where it had established roots since the late eighteenth century.¹⁵

Pushkin had a more refined approach towards non-Russian peoples. Scholars of Russian Literature suggest that he was influenced by Byron when he wrote *Ruslan and Lyudmilla*, a novel of exotic and backwards lands.¹⁶ Pushkin was not merely a curious observer as he lived and traveled in the Caucasus and did not treat his characters as one dimensional and predictable "Orientals." He virtually became one of them as he

¹⁴ Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, 411-12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹⁶ Brown, *A History of Russian Literature of the Romantic Period*, 30; and Tertz (Andrei Sinyavskii), *Strolls with Pushkin*. Edward Said considers Lord Byron one of the Western European writers who re-invented east of Europe as the "Orient" in their works. Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

identified with his non-Russian heroes, yet he seemed to take little interest in actual Caucasians while living in a hill station in Piatagorsk, Caucasus. Perhaps one reason for such lack of real interest in local populations was that writers like Pushkin possessed a strong desire to belong to the enlightened West and to do this required that they portray the East as alien and strange. The Russian “civilizer” could not be in the same category as the soon-to-be-civilized outsider. As a result, in late nineteenth century writings the repulsive image of the wild savage was softened so that Romantic writers could appear Enlightened and tolerant. The more objective the writer appeared, the more Western he became. Although Pushkin was quite inconsistent in this front, he made an effort to investigate and perhaps sympathize with the “wild savage.”

The rhetoric of victimization and backwardness perpetuated modern images of both the Russian and the non-Russian. In his novel *Time, Forward!*, Valentin Kataev reiterated Stalin’s declaration of the following words: “This was the history of old Russia: it was continually beaten because of backwardness. It was beaten by Mongol khans. It was beaten by Turkish *beks*...It was beaten because it was profitable to do so and because the beating went unpunished. That is why we cannot be backwards anymore.”¹⁷ During the final years of imperial and colonial power in non-Russian regions such as Central Asia, the tsarist regime was struggling with its own communities. One of the reasons for this was because Europe did not necessarily embrace Russia as one of their own.¹⁸

¹⁷ Kataev, *Time, Forward!* 12. I owe this reference to Bruce Grant.

¹⁸ Kandiyoti, “Post-colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia,” 289.

Categorizing Ethnicities

Officials of the imperial state, like the “Orientalist” Russian writers, were well aware of ethnic differences between the Russian and non-Russian subjects of the empire. Even without a cohesive and consistent policy, they emphasized these differences among its subjects, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Charles Steinwedel has shown in the context of Bashkiria, the late imperial Russian state categorized languages, religious practices and *byt* of non-Russians in order to assign new community characteristics to them. The categories in this new policy called *narodnost*’ and *natsional’nost* (“nationality that is based on ethnicity”), were imprecise. The policy vacillated between creating a unified Russian community among its subjects on the one hand, and emphasizing the ethnic differences on the other. This policy gradually forced ethnicities to become politicized communities.¹⁹

The Russian Empire laid the foundation of official policies toward non-Russian nationalities early on; the Bolsheviks transformed this into a Soviet nationalities policy. Although imperial and Soviet nationality policies were markedly different, the images of non-Russian nationalities they invoked were similar. In the seventeenth century, the Russian state began using the terms *inorodets* and *inoverets* (of a different kin and a different faith, respectively) for non-Russians. As Russia expanded farther out from the heartland into non-Russian territory, religion became the most important marker of

¹⁹ Steinwedel, “To Make a Difference: the Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics, 1861-1917,” 67-86.

separation between the Orthodox Christian Russian and the non-Christian outsider.²⁰

Imperial constructions of alien images and communities in the colonizer's mind made it easier to colonize non-Russian local populations. Michael Khodarkovsky has argued that the Imperial Russian state constructed official communities of the non-Orthodox native peoples in opposition to the Russians and classified the colonized native populations in separate categories according to a specific ethnic or religious group's economic and political status. Only religious conversion to Orthodoxy ended the status of the alien.²¹

Beginning with the capture of Kazan in 1552, Russian state officials began paying closer attention to the political, economic and religious classification of non-Russian Muslims and Turkic peoples as the empire conquered increasingly larger non-Russian territories. They began to realize that they needed to identify and categorize their non-Russian subjects, such as Kyrgyz, in order to impose cohesive policies. The state, however, constructed artificial and often overlapping categories, gathering certain dissimilar groups together, but separating similar groups from each other. To be sure, Russians were not the first ones to make such sweeping generalizations. They inherited many of these categories from the Chingissid Mongols, but Russian and non-Russian interpretation of the categories differed significantly. Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Kalmyks, Tatars and Bashkirs all considered themselves the inheritors of the Chingissid legacy, and often claimed close kinship with each other.²² Yet, some of the inheritors of Chingissid legacy

²⁰ For in-depth analyses of imperial Russian policies, see Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*; Geraci, *Window on the East*; Geraci and Khodarkovsky, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*; and Breyfogle, "Colonization by Contract."

²¹ Khodarkovsky, "Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia," 9-27.

²² For pre-revolutionary Kyrgyz history, see Aristov, *Usuni i kyrgyz ili kara-kyrgyz: Ocherki istorii i byta naseleniia zapadnogo Tian'-Shania i islodovaniia po ego istoricheskoi geografii*; Il'iasov, et al. *Ocherki po*

had converted to Islam, becoming members of a larger universal community. These overlapping community characteristics and categories were common among the Central Asians. The imperial administrators haphazardly borrowed some of these categories and ignored others depending on the political climate of the period.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian state began to cultivate a more broadly implemented notion of *grazhdanstvennost'* or "citizenship." Dov Yaroshevski, a scholar of the *inorodtsy* in the Russian Empire, has pointed out that the Russian concept of citizenship was created between 1767 and 1867.²³ For imperial Russians, a citizen possessed civic virtue, was a member of civil society, and obeyed civil order. In addition, citizenship represented a stage of social evolution after family and clanship. The influence of the Western European Enlightenment planted the seeds of human rights (mostly for men) for Russians and non-Russians. These seeds grew and culminated the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. State officials and the intelligentsia gradually shaped somewhat ambiguous policies out of immature institutions that would construct new communities for both Russian and non-Russian citizens. On the southern and eastern frontiers, the state searched for new ways to control its subjects. State officials realized that new social methods would have to support limited military control of imperial subjects, especially non-Russians, and, as a result, the initiation of citizenship

istorii dorevoliutsionnogo Kirgizstana; Davydovich, *Kirgiziia pri Karakhanidakh*; Masson, *Sredniaia Aziia i drevnii vostok*; Musaev, *Istoriia velikoi kyrgyzskoi imperii*; Musaev, *Izuchenie drevnego i srednevekovogo Kirgizstana*; Esen uulu, *Drevnekyrgyzskoe gosudarstvo Khagias*; and Doronbekova, Mokrynin and Ploskikh, *Kyrgyzdyn jana Kyrgyzstandyn taryhy*. Also, see Kassymbekov, *The Broken Sword (Slomannyi mech)*, a historical novel.

²³ Yaroshevski has also pointed out that two statesmen, Mikhail Speranskii and V. F. Timkovskii, pursued the redefinition of non-Russian imperial subjects in order to eradicate corruption in regional administration. Yaroshevski, "Empire and Citizenship," 66.

in the borderlands became an important imperial strategy.²⁴ The imperial strategy of citizenship included undermining kinship relationships based non-Russian aristocracies, promoting local self-governments, and reforming and reestablishing local justice systems. Through these means, the Russian state established imperial citizenship in order to through create obedient and loyal citizens.

Although Ivan the Terrible began the empire's advance southward, Catherine the Great was the first ruler to pay special attention to the Turkic and Muslim subjects of the empire. Under the influence of Western European Enlightenment figures, the tsaritsa felt that she should actively participate in governing nomadic peoples such as Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Bashkirs. As Yaroshevski has shown, Catherine supported Tatar attempts to build mosques in Kazan: she also supported the Orenburg governor O. I. Igel'strom (1784-92) in his efforts to use Tatar mullahs to sedentarize and "civilize" the nomads by introducing Islam and creating special district courts. A non-despotic approach was new and neither non-Russians nor their regional Russian administrators responded in a unified fashion. Catherine's efforts matured into government strategies in the century after her reign.²⁵ Following Catherine's example, Mikhail Speranskii, as noted above, believed that citizenship would improve the status and temperament of the non-Russians. In 1832, he placed the Bashkirs in the category of rural citizens in the *Digest of Laws*, hoping to transform them from nomads to settled agriculturalists. V. F. Timkovskii, the director of the Orenburg Border Commission (1819-1821), believed that the Russian administration

²⁴ For more details on the colonial conquest and organization of Central Asia, see Abdurakhimova, "The Colonial System of power in Turkestan," 239-62; Allworth, *Central Asia*; and Tchorev, "Historiography of Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan," 351-374.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

failed to integrate Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads into the empire because of its policy of repression and bureaucratic controls, and called for the establishment of civic responsibility and lawful conduct. Despite producing few actual improvements, these two men, at least, opened the discussion of citizenship laws and new ways of governance in the East.

Following Speranskii and Timkovskii's attempts, others tried to generate discussion on the description of citizenry and the evolution of societies. According to Yaroshevski, Professor K. A. Nevolin published a textbook in 1839 explaining the fundamentals of law, which went on to become a legal canon in Russia.²⁶ Nevolin placed the family and the kinship clan system of nomads in the past and instead suggested that they would eventually evolve from that "primitive" form into civil society.²⁷ He argued that societies that successfully experienced this evolution would have to impose their authority upon kinship-based nomads. Russians would have to impose the properly evolved form upon the "primitive" form the tribal non-Russian people. The Great Reforms of the 1860s, which resulted in the emancipation of the serfs, the promulgation of self-government, and the introduction of reformed judicial systems, reflected this theory, and attempted to introduce a new definition of citizenship among non-Russians.

In the 1860s the citizenship status of "Asiatic" peoples underwent several changes. War Minister D. A. Miliutin declared that the only way to reach a cohesive citizenship policy among non-Russians was to strip the borderland elites of their privileges. In practice, however, the definition of citizenship became a matter of

²⁶ For details on Nevolin's textbook see, Nevolin, *Istoriia rossiiskikh grazhdanskikh zakonov*.

²⁷ Yaroshevski, "Empire and Citizenship," 67.

negotiation between imperial administrators and non-Russian elites. Local leaders demonstrated that they still possessed the power to alter the political balance in their homelands, so the strategy failed to impose a Russian construction of citizenship. Instead, native leaders jockeyed for legitimization of their power by using the influence that came from their local kinship ties. For example, Uzbek leaders of the Fergana Valley never lost their influence on local populations.²⁸ They also used the financial resources earned through controlling local economic activities for regional governance.

The military subjugation of local populations prepared the way for the subordination of local leadership to the imperial center. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Central Asian political leaders like judges and *aksakals* (elderly leaders) gradually lost control of their positions.²⁹ As Central Asian scholar Nadira A. Abdurakhimova has pointed out, the imperial administration in Central Asia initiated a “center-periphery policy” following the complete military subjugation. According to Abdurakhimova, this policy combined Russian administrative traditions with regional legal systems, religious practices, and social and cultural customs. She has argued that the imperial government centralized the administration of the region by implementing constituent elements of the imperial bureaucracy, Russification of local populations, and subordination of local leaders to the center. Most importantly, she has suggested that by promoting loyal native leaders to high positions, imperial policy laid the foundation for the late Soviet model of national autonomy and the Soviet nationalities policy of

²⁸ See Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, and, idem, *Central Asia*.

²⁹ See the Glossary.

korenizatsiia, or “nativization,” promotion of indigenous cadres in the organs of government.³⁰

Historian Andreas Kappeler has pointed out that Westernization of the educated Russian elite gradually taught them “Eurocentric superiority.” Kappeler has also argued that in the nineteenth century, new racial prejudice against “Asiatics” arrived in Russia from the West and has suggested that Russian colonial rule borrowed its Central Asian segregationist policies from the British.³¹ The gradual creation of economic monocultures in Central Asia such as the cotton economy seems to have replicated Western colonial experiences and with it racial segregation.

This took place at the same time as the international rivalry for Central Asia known as the “Great Game.” During the early twentieth century, the Russian Empire was still expanding in all directions, but attempts to expand toward Western Europe were not producing results. The newly developing and Western-oriented public opinion of the late-nineteenth century among the Russian population lacked interest in the Central Asian conquest, but as Dietrich Geyer has posited, at the end of the nineteenth century, a few victories like the defeat of the Tekke Turkmens in Göktepe (1881) lifted the mood of the public, dispelling disappointments in the Western Frontier.³² Several generals who served the tsar in Central Asia and became national heroes due to such victories played an important role in the Pan-Slavic movement of the late 1800s. Russia’s desire for international success significantly influenced the expansion policies and as such, Russia’s

³⁰ Abdurakhimova, “The Colonial System of Power in Turkestan,” 239-62. For *korenizatsiia*, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

³¹ Kappeler, “Czarist Policy toward the Muslims of the Russian Empire,” 141-157.

³² Geyer, *Russian Imperialism*.

subjugation of the Central Asian peoples became symbols of colonial victories, often compensating for losses in the European theater.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, imperial Russian administrators believed that the Central Asian nomads would gradually begin to appreciate the superiority of sedentarism. They also believed that Muslim populations would eventually assimilate into Russian society. The record of cooperation among modernist Muslim and Turkic populations, however, suggested to Russian elites that assimilation would not occur naturally. In light of this, Russian elites established a discourse of Russian superiority. Scholars have shown that such attitudes originated from popular opinion among the Russian elites and wealthy classes.³³ In fact, the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and the early Bolshevik policies wiped out any hope of assimilating the Muslim and Turkic populations into the Russian society.³⁴

In April of 1905, a tolerance edict ended discrimination against non-Orthodox denominations. Many forcefully-converted Tatars returned to Islam. Furthermore, the “October Manifesto” of 1905 established civil rights for all nationalities and gave birth to legitimate nationalist movements.³⁵ By 1916, these movements among the Central Asian Turkic and Muslim populations had turned into an uprising. Both sedentary and nomadic populations had been in conflict with the settlers from European Russia when the government issued a decree in June 1916 to enlist almost 400,000 *inorodtsy* into the imperial army. Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmens, among others, resented giving up their

³³ Becker, “The Muslim East in Nineteenth Century Russian Popular Historiography,” 27-47.

³⁴ On January 9th, 1905, the Russian government’s armed forces attacked a striking workers’ demonstration in St. Petersburg. This was the beginning of the revolutionary era and the end of the empire.

³⁵ Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 334.

exemption from military service and began to attack Russian administrators and armed forces in their own regions. Kyrgyz Nomadic rebels destroyed most of the Russian settlements. The Russian forces retaliated; they massacred and forced thousands of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz to flee. During these bloody times, the Russian imposition of sedentarism failed to win over nomadic populations. Kyrgyz populations remaining within the imperial borders would only convert to sedentarism under Soviet rule.

Defining Social and Cultural Development during the Late Imperial Era

Since the era of Catherine the Great (1729-1796) and the Russian Enlightenment, many Russian elites had been looking to Western Europe for cultural development. Even before Catherine, however, one of the principal figures of cultural development was writer, scientist and educator and Mikhail Vasileevich Lomonosov (1711-1765). He was one of Empress Elizaveta Petrovna's (1709-1761) favorite reformers. Building on the reformist ideas of the elites such as Lomonosov, both the Western and inward-looking political and intellectual leaders of Russia began to address the issue of mass education. Reforms during the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) allowed interested Russian elites to begin working with ordinary people. He emancipated the serfs in 1861 and created the *zemstvos* (self-governing local institutions) in 1864.³⁶ Populist volunteers searched for their own roots while attempting to do some good through the dissemination of culture among the "ignorant" masses. With government support, some intellectuals helped bring education and entertainment in various forms from a variety of sources to the people of the empire, at least in the more accessible areas. Churches, *zemstvos*, various

³⁶ See Timberlake, "The *Zemstvos* and the Development of a Russian Middle Class."

government offices, factories and worker's assemblies provided campaigns, talks, plays and other means to educate while entertaining.³⁷

Like their counterparts in Europe, the intelligentsia of the nineteenth century opened their eyes and hearts to the harsh divide between themselves and the masses. The cruel gap between the privileged few and the poor masses of Russia was nothing new, nonetheless, the intelligentsia had rarely voiced an interest in the plight of the poor. That changed in the 1830s and 1840s as Russian elites began to take up the cause of educating the masses. Unlike their highly political European counterparts, Russian elites of this period approached social and cultural change almost romantically.³⁸ Unlike the state, they were more interested in fundamental social change rather than attempting change under the political status quo. For example, their discussions on how to reach the masses seemed more utopian than practical. The writings of Alexander A. Herzen (1812-55), Vissarion G. Belinsky (1811-48) and Mikhail A. Bakunin (1814-76), among others, provided a wealth of social criticism but failed to fully connect social reform with political action.³⁹ Among the writings of literary figures such as Ivan S. Turgenev (1818-83), there emerged an idealized image of the peasant life and commune (*obshchina*), which perpetuated the nostalgic approach of the mostly urbanized and westernized intellectuals to the rural masses.

³⁷ For more on cultural education of the era, see Billington, *The Icon and the Axe, An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*; Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*; and Swift, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia*.

³⁸ For detailed analysis of intellectual movements and philosophies among the Russian intellectual leaders of the era, see Hardy and Kelly, *Isaiah Berlin: Selected Writings, Russian Thinkers*.

³⁹ Malia, *Alexander Herzen*; idem, *Russia under Western Eyes*; Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*; Hardy and Kelly, *Isaiah Berlin: Selected Writings, Russian Thinkers*; and Leatherbarrow and Offord, *A Documentary History of Russian Thought*.

The nostalgic image of the Russian peasant commune was the cornerstone of Russian aristocrats' and intellectuals' alienation. Guilt was a tremendous force in guiding intellectuals to advocate different solutions.⁴⁰ The Westernizers saw Europe as the future, while the Slavophiles looked to their Slavic roots for solutions.⁴¹ Actually, Western ideas had failed to penetrate the social and cultural fabric of Russian society and even among the intelligentsia, Westernization remained superficial, or at least highly limited.⁴² Literate Russians, still less than ten percent of the population at the end of the 1850s, learned new ways of looking at the world from the point of view of German and French philosophers.⁴³ Many Russian elites came to believe that economic and social development of the larger population was necessary in order to belong to the West.

For the same reason, in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, the main goal of the Russian and Turkic elites was to improve the socio-economic conditions of society and to amend the relationship between the state and society. The elites consisted of professional state servants working for municipal governments, *zemstvos*, universities, and other institutions. These elites perceived themselves to have a common cause, especially since

⁴⁰ One of the reasons the Westernizers emerged was the failure of the Decembrists (the 1825 army officer uprising against the autocracy, and strong opponent of the regime of Nicholas I, who ruled between 1825 and 1855. The Decembrists had failed to create a revolutionary movement among the people. Their call for the constitutional limitation of the absolutist monarchy lacked democratic and revolutionary power. As a result of much needed reforms, the noble intelligentsia brought revolutionary socialism to Russia. The Westernizers gave rise to Russian socialism that included an ideology advocating a socialist future for Russia based on the peasant commune and Populism. For more, see Malia, *Alexander Herzen*, and, idem, *Russia under Western Eyes*.

⁴¹ Influential scholars such as V.O. Kliuchevskii and Marc Raeff argued that the alienation of the nobility was a result of Westernization. But this thesis overemphasizes alienation as an influence on the educated people.

⁴² For a discussion of the search for new Russian identity, bourgeois identity and diversity in the empire, see West, "The Riabushinsky Circle: *Burzhuaizii* and *Obshchestvennost'* in Late Imperial Russia," Owen, "Impediments to a Bourgeois Consciousness in Russia, 1880-1905."

⁴³ For a more complete analysis of literacy in late Imperial Russia, see Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*.

the state failed to recognize them as official leaders, but they were by no means a unified group and had different ideas about how to better the empire. They often dedicated themselves to social causes and regularly criticized the state. They took intellectual and ideological positions for the sake of the *narod*, or the people and began to express their concern for social problems and the lack of state interest in societal improvement.

Muslim and Turkic Jadids who preceded the Bolsheviks in Russia and Central Asia debated how they could retain their Islamic and Turkic traditions while modernizing their societies. Central Asian Bolsheviks also learned about reform and modernity from both Western and Islamic sources. Adeb Khalid's excellent study on Jadidism has shown that modernism came from many directions to Central Asia.⁴⁴ They did not always look to Western models of reform; the Muslim *umma* also offered possibilities. Ernest Gellner has suggested the Muslim *umma* was one of the world's earliest modern communities.⁴⁵ It provided a social and cultural framework for scripturalism and egalitarianism. Gellner has argued that the *umma* offered the Islamized peoples a new opportunity to belong to a unified community that crossed ethnic and imperial boundaries. Their historical setting, therefore, allowed Kyrgyz and to look to a variety of societies for possibilities of reform.

Many Turkic and Muslim elites such as Kazan Tatar Shihabeddin Merjani (1818-89), Crimean Tatar Ismail Bey Gasprinskii (1851-1914)⁴⁶, Uzbek Abdulhamid Sulayman Cholpan (1893-1938), and Kazakhs Shortambai Kanai uly (1818-81) and Ibrahim

⁴⁴ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*.

⁴⁵ Gellner, *Muslim Society*.

⁴⁶ See Ismail Bey Gasprinskii (Figure 11) on page 55.

Altynsarin (1841-89) formed movements that resembled their Russian counterparts, but these movements developed from ideologies that were not of Russian or European origin. Although some elites looked to Europe, others looked to the Ottoman Empire or to Muslim philosophies of cultural reform. Kadimists (believers in returning to the traditional ways) argued that adherence to the Muslim belief system would protect their place in the empire, while the Jadidists (believers in innovation and reform) sought national salvation in Western rationalism.⁴⁷ By the end of the nineteenth-century, some of the Turkic and Russian western-oriented elites came to represent radical or socialist positions. Others suggested that they needed to reject all traditional values in order to prompt change, and still others called for reliance on the wisdom of the people. Despite their various origins, the elites all advocated reaching out to the masses. Some elites even encouraged the eradication of ethnic differences, and all hoped for better relations among peoples of the empire, as well as between state and society.⁴⁸

Most Russian and Turkic elites read the social and political commentaries and theories of Western European philosophers. Some Turkic elites relied on the Russian renderings of the Western literature, while others were well-versed in the theories and the arguments of Muslim theoreticians, along with Ottoman reformers and conservatives. For example, the *salafiyya* movement (reformism in Islam) that Jamal ad-Din Afghani (1839-97) advocated greatly influenced the Muslims of Russia.⁴⁹ In spite of these

⁴⁷ Lazzerini, "Beyond Renewal: The Jadid Response to Pressures for Change in the Modern Age," 151-166.

⁴⁸ For detailed account of the Turkic intellectuals of the era, see Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*; Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia, 1905-1920*; Lazzerini, "Local Accommodation and Resistance to Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century Crimea;" Validov, *Ocherk istorii obrazovannosti i literaturny Tatar*; Benningsen and Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *La Presse et le mouvement national chez les Musulmans de Russie avant 1920*; and Hayit, *Türkistan Milli Mücadele Tarihi*.

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive study on Afghani, see Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh*.

significant differences in their ideological origins, two defining features characterized these men's perspectives. First, they were displeased with the social and political *status quo* in the empire and called for a change in economic and cultural disparities among the people. Second, they wanted to take an active political and ideological stance and, at least in theory, go to the people.

The intellectual elites of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Imperial Russia, both Russian and Turkic, shared intellectual origins and several essential viewpoints. Despite the differences in the titles of their movements, titles that they either adopted themselves or received from others, their intellectual growth followed a similar path. Although some Russian elites came from the nobility, Turkic elites came from more diverse backgrounds, but they all belonged to the fortunate minority who received a formal education at home or abroad, where they, in contrast to the mass population of the empire, had the opportunity to read and discuss Western European philosophy. They formed circles to discuss German Romanticism, French Utopianism, nationalism, and socialism. They developed periodicals and used the print media to disseminate their ideas. Some adhered to Pan-Slavism, or Pan-Turkism, or Pan-Islamism; others followed the path of radical socialism, or even anarchism.

Among the Turkic peoples, Tatar thinkers led the way toward Westernizing ideas.⁵⁰ In the nineteenth-century, Tatar elites examined the importance of Islam, the role of ethnicity in the formation of modern Tatar community, and defined and developed the

⁵⁰ In the late 1700s and early 1800s, the poems and commentaries of Utiz-Imeni, Abu Nasr al-Kursavi, Ibrahim Khalfin, and various other writers began to distinguish the Tatars from the rest of the Turkic peoples of the empire.

distinct idea of “Tatarness.”⁵¹ One such thinker, Shihabeddin Merjani, was a leading advocate of modern Tatar community among the Kazan Tatars. His contemporaries, Khusain Faizkhanov (1828-1866) and Abdul Kayyum an-Nasiri (1825-1902), who was often called the Tatar Lomonosov, were cultural reformists.⁵² Most importantly, they studied twelfth and thirteenth century Muslim scholarship such as the works of Abu-Hamid Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali’s works had been influential among the thinkers of the Muslim world, including Arab and Persian reformists. Following the arguments of the early Muslim natural philosophers, Tatar thinkers discussed the changing role of religion in the so-called Age of Reason, emphasizing the importance of science in understanding the universe and religion. Latter scholars including Ismail Bey Gasprinskii of Crimea (1851-1914), Munawwar Qari of Turkestan (1878-1931), Ahmed Aghayev of Azerbaijan (1869-1939), Musa Jarullah Bigi of Tatarstan (1875-1949), and Abdulhamid Sulayman Cholpan and Abdullah Qadiriy of Uzbekistan (1894-1939) wrote on the compatibility of modernity, national community, and Islam.⁵³ They studied Qur’anic Law and its commentaries at the *madrasas* of Bukhara, Samarkand, Mecca, and Constantinople. A small minority of these scholars had the opportunity to study both Islamic and Western philosophies, working as academicians among Russians in St. Petersburg. Merjani became a member of the St. Petersburg Archeological Society in the late 1860s; Bigi registered as an auditor at the Law Faculty of the St. Petersburg University early in the

⁵¹ For the contribution of Tatar intellectuals to “modernity,” see Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*; and Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*.

⁵² Shamiloglu, “The Formation of a Tatar Historical Consciousness: Shihabeddin Marcani and the Image of the Golden Horde,” 39-49.

⁵³ Murphy, “Abdullah Qadiriy and the Bolsheviks: From Reform to Revolution,” 190-203. For a sampling of Modernist Muslim ideology and scholarship, see Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940*.

twentieth century. These men benefited from their intellectual interaction with their Russian counterparts.

Turkic thinkers actively sought to incorporate outside influences, including those from the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Turkestan. Rizaeddin bin Fakhreddin (1858-1936) studied the non-dogmatic approach to Islam, and shared revolutionary ideas with Ottoman reformers of the *Tanzimat* era (the reformist reorganization of the state and society that began in 1839).⁵⁴ Like the Tanzimat reformers, bin Fakhreddin believed in the development of the press and literature as a means for reformist ideas. These elites left a significant legacy on cultural and social reforms.

Defining Kazakhness and Kyrgyzzness

A significant number of Turkic thinkers with diverse ethnic backgrounds developed and expanded the ideas of their Tatar counterparts. Like the Tatars, Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectual development occurred in two opposing camps. For both camps the definition of Kazakhness and Kyrgyzzness was at stake: how were they to characterize their new communities in this changing world, where they were surrounded by reformist trends? How were they to incorporate indigenous religious and regional communities with that of a larger national community? Kazakh and Kyrgyz identities were not empty vessels to be filled with an entirely new substance; these people knew their history and were well aware of who they were, but they were now faced with new definitions of their community within the nation-state.

⁵⁴ For Tanzimat reforms and their influence on the Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire, see Faroqhi, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*; and Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*.

This first group was intellectually orientated toward Islam and included the poets of *Zar Zaman*, (the epoch of hardship). Dulat Babatai-uly (1802-71), Murat Monke-uly (1843-1906), and Abubakir Kerderi (1858-1903) belonged in this group. They idealized their nomadic past and advocated that a stronger adherence to Islam solve the problems of the Kazakh steppe. By contrast, the pro-Muslim Kazakh journal *Aiqap* (1911-15) (*Aiqap* is an ancient Kazakh phrase used as an interjection to get someone's attention) addressed the issue of Islamic reform and the betterment of the Kazakh society through the implementation of the "New Method," or *Usul-i Jadid*.⁵⁵ Tatar Jadidist Ismail Gasprinskii had developed the "New Method," which advocated phonetic teaching of Arabic, curriculum reforms, and the teaching of scientific subjects in Tatar schools. Islamic-oriented elites among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz also called for such reforms.

A second group of Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectual elites included pro-Russian and secularized thinkers who made their mark on the literate Kyrgyz and *akyns* (bards).⁵⁶ Shokan (Chokan) Valikhanov (1835-65)⁵⁷, Ibrahim (Ibrai) Altynsaryn (1841-89), and Abai Kunanbaev or Kunanbai-uly (1845-1904) were representatives of this secular group, who called for Russian and European education in schools. Many of these elites came from leading Kazakh families and Kyrgyz lineages of *manaschys* (bards who recite the national epic *Manas*) and *akyns*.⁵⁸ They were educated in Russian schools and resented

⁵⁵ For details on Kazakh intellectual trends and figures see, Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 108. For details on *Aiqap* see, Subkhanberdina, Dautov, *Aiqap = Ay qap = Ai-kap / qurastyrushylar*. I owe this reference to Gregory Tomasin.

⁵⁶ See the Glossary for detail.

⁵⁷ See Valikhanov (Figure 12) on page 56.

⁵⁸ See the Biography and, also for oral literature and *Manas* see Karypkulov, et al. eds., *Manas Entsiklopediya*; Valikhanov, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*; Bogdanova et al., *Kirgizskii geroicheskii epos "Manas;"* Kebekova, "Kurmanbek" *eposunun variantary*; Nurunbetov et al., *Babalarдын Osuyatynan Memlekettik Ideologiya*; Kydyrbaeva et al., *Varianty eposa "Manas;"*

the influence of the Muslim Tatar missionaries in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz lands.⁵⁹

During the first half of the twentieth century, many of the new generation of Kazakh elites like Alikhan Bukeikhanov (1869-1932) and Akhmet Baitursynov (1873-1937), both editors of the political journal *Qazaq* (1913-18), studied in Russian schools, military academies, and universities. They published articles on the grim economic predicament of the nomadism. This secular group became more influential than the pro-Islamic group among the upper levels of society because of the tsarist policy of promoting indigenous people who were westward-looking to regional leadership positions in Central Asia.

Westernization among the Turkic elites is best demonstrated in the relationship between the Kazakh Shokan Valikhanov and his Russian teachers and friends.

Valikhanov was a Kazakh aristocrat who was greatly influenced by his Westernized grandmother Aiganym. His first formal education took place in the Omsk *Kadet Korpus*, and later continued informally under S. F. Durov, Feodor Dostoevsky, and P. P.

Semenov-Tian-Shanskii. Valikhanov combined his knowledge of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic Chagatai, acquired before entering the *Kadet Korpus*, with his new knowledge of Western and Russian literature and science. In the *Korpus*, among other revolutionary ideas, he learned about Belinsky and Chernyshevsky. His intellectual and personal interactions with Durov, Dostoevsky and Semenov exposed Valikhanov to democratic and utopian socialist ideas. Because of his relationship with Semenov, he became a member of the Imperial Geographic Society, earning the opportunity to travel to Kashgar

Lipkina et al., *Manas: Kirgizskii epos. Velikii pokhod*; Sadykov et al., *Manas: Kirgizskii geroicheski epos*; Berkov and Sadigova, *Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' literatury o "Manase"*; Benningsen, "The Crisis of the Turkic National Epics, 1951-1952;" Prior, *Patron, Party, Partimony*; and Gürsoy-Naskali, *Bozkırdan Bağımsızlığa Manas*.

⁵⁹ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 105-6.

and other parts of Central Asia. Few years before his early death in 1865, Valikhanov attended lectures in St. Petersburg, prepared reports and maps for the Asiatic Department, and befriended many Russian intellectuals. Valikhanov became committed to his people's enlightenment through secular education and through close relations with the Westernized sections of Russian culture. He believed that Kazakh people should revere their slowly disappearing nomadic Kazakh traditions, but they should also sedentarize in order to keep up with the rest of the empire, and the world.⁶⁰

In the meantime, members of the pro-Islamic *Zar Zaman* argued that Russian annexation of Kazakh and Kyrgyz lands greatly harmed their independence as pastoral nomads and their Islamic faith. Moreover, they believed Turkic people needed Islam to carry them through hard times and the Westernizing attitudes of the thinkers such as Shokan Valikhanov endangered a new Muslim and Turkic community. The desperate situation that emerged from the famines of the late 1890s and the Russian seizure of Kazakh and Kyrgyz lands, however, forced these elites to turn to their reformist Tatar counterparts. They wanted to introduce to their people the cultural advances that Tatar innovations achieved in the new-method schools, although these schools offered semi-secularized education. At the beginning of the twentieth century, pro-Islamic Kazakh and Kyrgyz elites found many commonalities with other Turkic secular elites. Closing the intellectual gap among the elite helped form future political movements that centered on finding an autonomous place for Turkic people in this rapidly changing empire.

⁶⁰ For Valikhanov, see Marghulan, *Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, and Kasymjanov, *Portrety, Shtrikhi k istorii Stepi*.

Kyrgyz *manaschys* and *akyns* best represented the main Kyrgyz thinkers of the late imperial era. Influential akyn Kalygul Bay-uulu (1785-1855) expressed the grievances of the Kyrgyz people in the Russian empire in his verses on the brutality of the Russian military excursions and under Russian imperial hegemony. Kalygul's epic verses also lamented the divisiveness of the military conflicts between the two legendary and powerful tribes of Sarybagysh and Bugu.⁶¹ In other words, he promoted a message of unity among Kyrgyz against the foreign enemy. Abylabek A. Asankanov and Nelya H. Bekmuhamedova have argued that Kalygul's early songs represented the *Akyr Zaman* (the Judgment Day) poetry that blamed the ills of the society on modernity, but pointed out that Kalygul eventually came to admit that modern education was the way of the future:⁶²

*Ilgerkini karasang-
Jamanyñ jakshy tildegen.
Jakshysy ilim bilbegen.*

*Karangylyk ushundai.
Arasynda Kalygul
Yilagan közdün jashyndai...*⁶³

If you look at the past
A nobleman scolded a bad man.
The nobleman had no knowledge of
science.

There was such darkness
Kalygul was among them,
Like a teardrop from the crying eye.

Kalygul's successors, such as the creator of *Tar Zaman* (the epoch of irreparability) Arstanbek Builash-uulu (1824-1878), sang about the devastating consequences of the Russian migrants into Kyrgyz and Kazakh lands and advocated the unified resistance of nomadic and Turkic peoples. These akyns strongly implied that to be Kyrgyz and Kazakh one needed to resist Russian colonial control.

⁶¹ Osmanalieva, "Tribalism in Kyrgyz Society," 10-11.

⁶² Asankanov and Bekmuhamedova, *Akyndar jana manaschylar*, 79.

⁶³ Umetaliyev, *Kalygul Bai-uulu, Kalygul, Kazybek. Kazaldar*, 26.

*Kyrgyz, Kazakh jyiylp,
Bata kylyp alsak beim?
Kashkardagy Bakdöölöt
Ata kylyp alsak beim?*⁶⁴

After gathering Kyrgyz and Kazakhs,
Why not get their blessing?
Bakdöölöt of Kashgar:
Why not choose him as our leader?

Moldo Kylych Shamyrcan-uulu (1860-1918), an influential akyn of the *Zar Zaman* movement, held views more similar to the reformist elites. Without endorsing the views of the western-oriented Turkic thinkers, Moldo Kylych sang about the virtues of the Russian way of living. He praised the practicality but condemned the morals of the Russian settlers he observed.⁶⁵ A group of akyns like Toktogul Satylganov (1854-1933)⁶⁶, Togolok Moldo (1860-1942)⁶⁷, Kalyk Akiyev (1883-1953), and Barpy Alykulov (1884-1949), who lived through the transition from the imperial to the Soviet period, began singing about the hardship that Kyrgyz people suffered in the hands of the *manaps* and *bais* (wealthy men). Their songs targeted the Russian Tsar, the Muslim mullahs and the so-called Kyrgyz aristocrats, more appropriately called clan leaders. Skillful akyns such as Toktogul appealed to Kyrgyz audiences with songs that successfully juxtaposed love of the Kyrgyz people and environment and the injustices committed against both. In the twentieth century, Kyrgyz Toktogul's name has become synonymous with akyn, and his songs signify the cultural revolution that followed the Bolshevik take over.⁶⁸

*Kaigy basyp cher bolup,
Jüdüp jüröt bukara,
Kuzgundarga jem bolup.
Jürö albady shordular,
Bai-manapka teng bolup.*

Defeated by misery and suffering,
Anguished, live the people,
Becoming prey to the ravens.
Wretched people
Cannot compete with the *bai-manaps*.

⁶⁴ Builash-uulu, *Arstanbek*, 37.

⁶⁵ Kylych, *Kazaldar*, 233-234.

⁶⁶ See Toktogul (Figure 13) on page 57.

⁶⁷ See Togolok Moldo (Figure 14) on page 58.

⁶⁸ Toktogul was honored with the Toktogul State Prize in 1965. Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*, 238.

*Chygym dep alat maldaryn,
Airansyz koyot baldaryn,
Alsyz kedei amal jok
Kötöröt baidyn salganyn...*⁶⁹

Exhorting the cattle away,
Leaving the children without *airan*,
The poor, weak with no hope,
He bears the burden of the *bais*.

Toktogul sang praises to those who valued hard work and diligence, but condemned those whom he called failures and freeloaders. He implied that Kyrgyznes needed to adopt certain, although selective, aspects of Russian life.

In conclusion, among Turkic elites' discussions of ethnic nationalism, modernist Westernization, and socialism began to develop simultaneously. A handful of influential Tatar thinkers proposed "Tatar Turkism" but others such as Ismail Gasprinskii and Yusuf Akchura proposed a pan-Tatarist view. Akchura (1876-1935), who earned a Sorbonne law degree, became a leader in the pan-Tatarist movement. Gasprinskii's newspaper *Tercuman/Perevodchik* (The Interpreter) was the most influential newspaper among the Muslims of Russia for forty years, until about 1918. He proselytized that Tatars benefited from the Russian intellectual influences and that Russian and Tatar histories and cultures were inseparable.⁷⁰ In the meantime, others such as the Bashkir thinker Ahmed Zeki Velidi Togan (1890-1970) called for unity among the Turkic peoples of Russia.⁷¹ Kazakh and Kyrgyz akyns, on the other hand, attempted to capture these revolutionary trends for their people. Their nomadic existence, their own interpretations of Islam, and their unique relationship with the Russian Empire forced them to evaluate their new communities. But most of these thinkers held the view that the Turkic peoples

⁶⁹ Toktogul, *Kyrgyz noeziyasynyn antologiyasy*, 398.

⁷⁰ Thus, his Pan-Tatarism differed from the pan-Turkism of the Ottomans.

⁷¹ To be sure, Togan expressed the opposite view and called for independence of all Turkic people, once he escaped to Turkey after the Bolshevik revolution and the defeat of the Bashkir Republic. See Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş*; and idem, *Hatıralar*. See Zeki Velidi Togan (Figure 15) on page 59.

of Russia were integral parts of the empire. Despite being confronted with centuries-old “alien” images of themselves in this empire that constructed its community as Orthodox Christian and Slavic, they attempted to redefine their own communities. The result of this quest was the realization that there was no one, permanent image of ethnic Kyrgyz or Kazakh national community. This image was in flux, contested and unstable when the Bolshevik ideas arrived. The Bolshevik revolutionaries in Central Asia, both Russian and indigenous, had to learn to cope with ethnic and national communities that were diverse and complex.

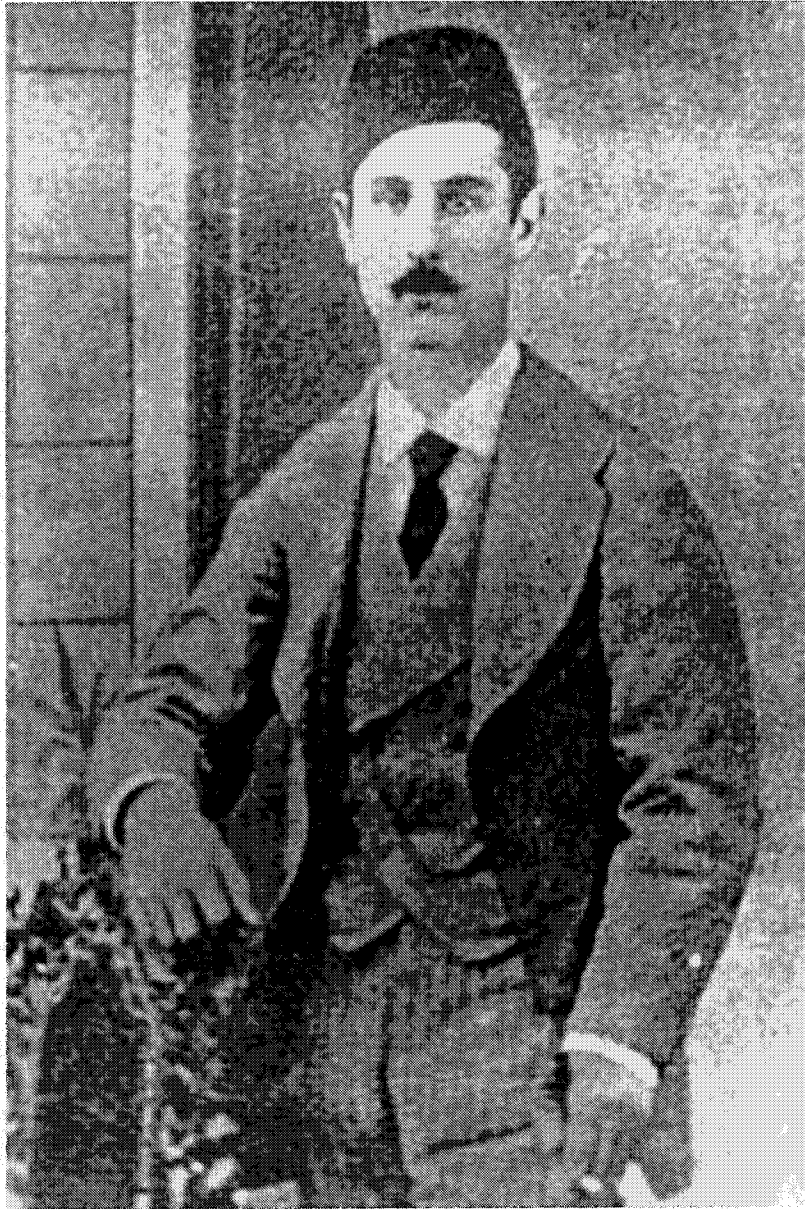


FIGURE 11: Ismail Bey Gaspirali in Paris, 1872, source: <http://www.iccrimea.org>



FIGURE 12: Chokan Valikhanov, source: <http://expat.nursat.kz/>



FIGURE 13: Toktogul Satylganov, source: Kochkor Museum.



FIGURE 14: Togolok Moldo, source: <http://numismondo.com>.



FIGURE 15: Zeki Velidi Togan, source: www.kimkimdir.gen.tr.

CHAPTER TWO
THE MAKING OF SOVIET CULTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN
DURING THE 1920s AND 1930s

1. *The Clubs must belong to the workers. In the clubs, they should improve their own amateur talents.*
2. *It is imperative that the Marxist guidance is deepened.*
3. *It is imperative to turn the clubs into collectives of amateur talents.*

Nadezhda Krupskaja

Nadezhda Krupskaja, the Bolshevik leader and wife of Lenin, identified three essential functions of clubs: “improving amateur talents,” “teaching Marxist ideology,” and “collectivizing” the institution. As one of the first Bolsheviks to define the role of clubs in forging Soviet culture, Krupskaja provides important evidence for early Soviet cultural policies.¹ Using Kyrgyz clubs as a case study, we are able to analyze Bolshevik discourse of “cultural transformation.” Krupskaja’s list of the three functions of clubs provides a window into both the cultural and the nationalities policies. According to Krupskaja, “improvement of amateur talent” refers to cultural development in accordance with Marxist ideology, a development that had to take place among all nationalities. Krupskaja and other leading Bolsheviks inherited their understanding of non-Russian nationalities and ways of reforming them from their colonial predecessors. Their seemingly Marxist discourse of “cultural transformation” was undeniably built upon a colonial tradition of reform.

Since this is a study of clubs in Kyrgyzstan, the questions at hand are: can we discern from an examination of the official discourse of regional and *ail* club administrators how the Bolshevik revolutionaries defined the duties and responsibilities

¹ N. K. Krupskaja, “What should the worker’s clubs do?” and “What is a club?”

of clubs? What sorts of cultural and social policies did club administrators rely on while setting the stage for a new and revolutionary culture in Kyrgyzstan? This chapter provides background on how the Bolsheviks prepared the clubs to conduct the cultural and ideological education of the Kyrgyz populations during the 1920s and early 1930s. First, it analyzes the main concerns of the Bolsheviks regarding the nationalities in Central Asia; second, it examines the ways in which the revolutionaries engaged regional community characteristics such as nomadism and Islam; finally, it turns to the beginnings of the definition of Kyrgyzness in clubs during these early years.

Using the official Soviet regulations of the clubs, I argue that early Bolshevik attempts at converting Kyrgyz to Soviet culture were volatile at best: The revolutionary administrators were perplexed when faced with this unfamiliar culture, and were therefore forced to rely on the views of their imperial predecessors, while at the same time they tried to denounce the imperial colonialism that had allowed them to enter these non-Russian lands. They introduced new artistic norms such as the Proletkul't movement and its successors, intended to build a more proletarian culture. The social and economic climate that followed the New Economic Policy (NEP) did not allow for a steady cultural policy in Kyrgyzstan, as a result, Kyrgyz revolutionaries such as writers and artists, and administrators such as club managers, began to form a new Kyrgyz community for themselves. This chapter discusses how they began to fashion such a community and what this community resembled.

The Bolsheviks' Nationalities Problem

In many respects, the Bolsheviks were successors of the Russian intellectuals of the imperial era. They debated and often disagreed about the values of Westernization, modernity, populism, and other issues in an effort to initiate cultural change. Vladimir I. Lenin's writings defined culture in broad terms that reflected his admiration of the Western European efficiency that resulted from industrial advancement, social orderliness, educational and cultural sophistication of the elites. Lenin envisioned Bolshevik culture would bring such efficiency, and all its accompanying successes, to the masses. Developing the culture of the masses would be the unique achievement of the Soviet Union and would surpass Western European societies. The Soviet concept of culture originated from the Western European models, but emerged also in opposition to them.²

Regarding the nationalities problem, the Bolsheviks wanted to rupture colonial policy in the region. At the beginning, their Marxist intellectual orientation required that the Bolsheviks condemn colonialism and imperialism, move beyond national and ethnic allegiances, and establish working-class communities. When they advocated that "the dictatorship of the proletariat" would eventually rule Russia (and the rest of the world), they failed to foresee the rise of nationalist movements among the non-Russian elites. Lenin's vision of a socialist society did not include the cultural autonomy of Russia's

² For a helpful discussion on Bolshevik definitions of culturedness, see Volkov, "The Concept of *Kul'turnost'*: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process," 210-230.

nationalities.³ Lenin wanted a Soviet Union with one culture that incorporated every Soviet nationality's tradition, and became an example for the rest of the future communist world. This utopian view failed when faced with the realities of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Russia which was home to many non-Russian, non-Orthodox peoples such as the Kyrgyz.

Bolshevik attitudes towards the social and cultural traditions of Central Asian nationalities did not constitute a clear policy. For the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary goal was to rid the country of the 'backwards traditions' of all people, not only of specific nationalities. They barely distinguished the 'backwards' Russian peasant from the 'ignorant' Kyrgyz nomad.⁴ Nevertheless, when confronted with non-Russian

³ Scholars have elaborated on the nuances of the Soviet nationalities policy, giving it various names: Yuri Slezkine and others have argued that the "chronic ethnophilia" of the Soviet state was a result of a modernizing state policy, rather than a weakness of the nationalities policy. Slezkine has shown that the Soviet state allowed the nationalities to modernize and promote their own cultures as long as they remained subordinate to the central authority of the state. Terry Martin has broadened Slezkine's argument and suggested that the Bolsheviks passed definitive resolutions on the nationality question to establish an "affirmative action" program, which bolstered the non-Russian nationalities' political place in the Union. Martin has concluded that non-Russian nationalities gained special status supported by the state's affirmative action quotas that the "Great" Russians could not enjoy. Francine Hirsch characterized the Soviet society as "a socialist union of denationalized peoples." Hirsch has argued that Soviet nationality policy followed a long-term centralizing strategy, a kind of a "state-sponsored evolutionism," to assimilate the nationalities into small and easily-controlled socialist states. Arne Haugen has followed Rogers Brubaker's definition of the nation as "an event" which emerges due to special political and social circumstances. According to Haugen, the special circumstance was the delimitation process that allowed the Central Asians to create their modern Soviet nationalities whose new republics "corresponded to historical divisions and formations." He has argued that Central Asian communists "nationalized the political discourse." See, Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment;" idem, "Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism;" Sabol, "The Creation of Soviet Central Asia;" Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 19; Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations," 201-26; Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*, 7; and for more on nationalism, see Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*.

⁴ Lenin reinterpreted the education policies of the late nineteenth century Russian Empire that had utilized national languages as tools of the imperial civilizing project. The influential Russian educator and Orthodox missionary Nikolai Ivanovich Il'minskii (1822-91) designed a system that 'civilized' the *inorodtsy*—foreigner—such as the Kazan Tatars, in their own language. Although Lenin believed that there was no such a person as an *inorodtsy* in the new socialist system, all Soviet peoples would contribute to the "building of socialism" in their own languages and forge a country of equals without national differences.

nationalist/socialist leadership, the Bolshevik leadership began to consider the idea of the Soviet Union as a union of self-determined nationalities. Even when Lenin spoke about the right of self determination for nationalities, he indicated that each case would be treated separately and differently.⁵ The resulting inconsistent treatment of nationalities mirrored the unpredictability of the stances that Turkic leaders took. For example, in Muslim Russia, Bashkir, Tatar, and Kazakh leaders, were more outspoken about their desire for self-determination than Kyrgyz leaders. Still partially nomadic, the Kyrgyz were too far away from Moscow, both geographically and culturally. Only in late 1919 did Bolshevik power begin to penetrate into Kyrgyz territories.

For the Bolsheviks, mass education was the first step toward a revolution in culture. Lenin's speeches reflected his desire to educate all the nationalities equally without promoting an ethnic hierarchy.⁶ The Nationalities Commissar Josef V. Stalin (who worked in this position between 1917 and 1922) did not follow through with Lenin's vision of the education of the nationalities. In 1922, even before Lenin died, Stalin's deputies adopted a much more aggressive stance toward the cultural development of the Central Asian populations. Stalin's emerging policies towards the Turkic and Muslim nationalities demonstrated a firmer and more intrusive administration of cultural and educational spheres. Leading Turkic and Muslim communists recognized the changing policy. Tatar leader Mirsaid Sultangaliev (1880-1939?), an advocate of a unified and proletarian Muslim nation, emphasized the importance of education reform if

For general description of the policy, and specific treatment of nationalities, see, Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy" and Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*.

⁵ For details see Lenin, "The Question of Nationalities."

⁶ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 209.

the Muslim peoples were to become equal participants in the Soviet Union.⁷ These leaders also heard discontented speeches of the rising leaders like Stalin, who were impatient with the unclear policies for reforming the “backwards” non-Russian cultures and understood that the nationalities would have to give up some of their traditions.

During the mid-1920s, Bolshevik policies among Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and other non-Russian populations still rested on the civilizing projects of the imperial era. Daniel Brower has shown that the Bolsheviks used many colonial tactics, such as the categorization and exploitation of the ethnic groups, to organize the Soviet nationalities.⁸ The imperial policy of “civilizing the natives” and the Bolshevik policy of “enlightening the locals” did not vary significantly. In Kyrgyz lands, the central and regional administrators of Stalin’s Narkompros (National Commissariat of Education) interpreted indigenous cultures as superficially as their imperial predecessors did. Soviet nationalities and education administrators saw Kyrgyz culture as substandard to the sedentary societies, such as the Uzbeks, that had a written literature and urban architecture. A protocol from the Tokmak region demonstrates that it was essential for administrators to “unite the nationalities” in order to “develop the nomadic society into a settled one.”

Having heard the report of the chairperson of the Raion Political Education Committee on the members of the amateur drama circles, Uzbek “Izchilar” and Russian-Ukrainian-Tatar “Red star” groups we have decided that for the promotion of cultural education it is necessary to unite all national circles into one powerful organization named after Vladimir Ilich Lenin.⁹

⁷ Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, 207-8.

⁸ Brower and Lazzarini, *Russia’s Orient*.

⁹ “The Protocol of the Organizational Session of the Members of Amateur Drama Circles of Tokmak,” March, 31, 1924. TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 295, l. 64.

The protocol argued that in order to improve the cultural development of the Kyrgyz ails it was necessary to provide examples from Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar and Uzbek villages. According to the protocol, drama circles were one of the first groups to establish this goal.

Kyrgyz, on the other hand, continued to take pride in their nomadic cultural traditions that included age-old, internalized oral literature and a dynamic lifestyle that avoided anything that would tie them down, such as permanent dwellings, books, furniture, and bulky arts and crafts.¹⁰ But, during the second half of the 1920s, under pressure from the authorities, the definition of Kyrgyzness began to change to suit the official identities. In a club at the *Jeti Oguz Raion*, for example, the manager reported that although Kyrgyz members wanted to read stories about their national heroes and their wisdom, they began to show some interest in reading about the heroes of the Great October Revolution.¹¹ This report indicated that Kyrgyz club members started to respond to the authorities, or at least pretended to do so. It is difficult to know whether the manager of this club was simply catering to the governments' wishes. Nevertheless, as a resident of this region, he was learning to speak the language of the Party.

During the mid to late 1920s, the Soviet Union aimed for centralized political, economic and cultural control of all peripheries, including Kyrgyzstan. On the cultural front, nationalities and education commissars requested that resources (books, journals,

¹⁰ For comparative purposes and in order to see the evolution of Soviet culture in Kyrgyzstan see the current state of a Northern Kyrgyz village see Yoshida, "A Field Report on Economic Transition: Lifestyle Changes in a Village of Northern Kyrgyzstan," 1-9. Yoshida provides a glimpse at pre- and post-Soviet era cultural changes in a small town.

¹¹ "The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in the Jeti Oguz Raion of Karakol-Naryn Okrug --July 12 to August 25, 1925," August 26, 1925. TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

posters, films, and the like) were distributed uniformly in all remote regions without necessarily keeping ethnicity in mind. The lack of proper management and the shortage of educational materials, however, crippled efforts in all regions, including faraway regions such as Kyrgyzstan.¹² The manager of Karakol Raion, Comrade Grin, for example, reported that the lack of reading materials slowed down their education courses. The similarities of their efforts in all regions of USSR indicate that unlike their colonial predecessors, both Lenin- and Stalin-era administrators did not single out certain ethnic groups for what the official documents called “cultural transformation.” Their official rhetoric claimed that Soviet administrators viewed Muslim populations as equal citizens and aimed to include them fully in all reform programs. In effect, the cultural differences between the nationalities bothered these educators and nationalities commissars, who viewed diversity in socio-economic behaviors and national traditions as distractions from class-based unity. Thus, their approach to the nationalities was ambiguous at best. They wanted unity, but utilized regional traditions and customs to educate. For example, they encouraged the employment of traditionally respected Kyrgyz aksakals, whose identities rested on Kyrgyz heritage, to motivate Kyrgyz youths.

The Bolsheviks constructed an anti-colonial discourse in Kyrgyzstan that condemned the politics and culture of the imperial regime, but they never considered releasing the administration in Kyrgyzstan entirely to the native populations and their administrative and cultural traditions. In Kyrgyzstan, Bolshevik administrators continued

¹² “The Report of Kara Kol District Union of the Forestry Workers on Cultural Work among the Members of the Union,” October 25, 1924. TsGAKSSR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 35, l. 28.

to implement some colonial projects such as sedentarization of the nomads.¹³ Like their imperial predecessors, the Bolsheviks continued to establish military forts, turn forts into urban centers, transplant European populations into the area, and begin to educate the local populations. Bolshevik administrators also borrowed some of the imperial social and cultural concepts from the old regime, such as the ethnographic categorization of the peoples of Kyrgyzstan according to their physical appearances. The new state, however, abandoned its predecessors' slow but steady policy of cultural change in Kyrgyzstan, launching a significantly rushed cultural education project.¹⁴

Bolshevik education established an official history of the revolutionary period which claimed that all leaders "voluntarily" participated in the revolution and rejected those all leaders who were loyal to the empire. This education also emphasized that the enlightened communists of Kyrgyzstan turned away from the oppressive culture of their religious and administrative predecessors. The official history of the revolutionary take-over of Kyrgyzstan also established that there was a radical discontinuity between the policies of the imperial/colonial regime and the Bolshevik liberators.¹⁵ On June 21, 1921, the Congress of the Turkestan Republic's Department of National Education Managers issued "the Objectives of the Art Department of the National Commissariat of Education"

In Turkistan, the colonial policy of Imperial Russia intentionally stunted the economic and cultural growth of the local population. The arts of the local population were lingering on feudal patriarchal level. Exclusive

¹³ For continuity or change in imperial Russian/Soviet policies see Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*; Roy, *The New Central Asia*; Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations;" and Slezkine, "Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism."

¹⁴ For an analysis of such hurried Soviet "cultural transformation" among Nivkhi, see Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture*.

¹⁵ For official histories of the Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, see Dzhangerchinov, *Dobrovol'noe vkhozhdenie kirgizskogo naroda v sostav Rossii*; *Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSR*; Zhantuarov, *Grazhdanskaia voina v Kirgizii, 1918-1920 gg.*

bourgeois art was absent from the lives of the local population, but remained dominant and was the property of the bourgeois European population in Turkestan.

The October revolution, having expelled the bourgeois and its colonial policy, has set out a task in backward Turkestan to achieve perfected communist goals in the field of economic and cultural life, calling on the local population to become its builders.¹⁶

The colonial “civilizing” projects claimed to have brought modern infrastructure, education, and urbanization to some areas of Central Asia, but nomadic Kyrgyz culture remained mostly untouched by these late nineteenth-century developments.¹⁷

The Bolsheviks implemented similar cultural education policies in all ethnic regions, including Russian and other Slavic areas. One of the main goals of cultural education, the assault on religious and indigenous traditions, followed the same pattern in all “backwards” regions.¹⁸ Bolshevik ideology required not only the participation, but also the understanding of the masses; therefore education was fundamental to its success. The ideology dictated that the education and enlightenment of the proletariat would lead the way to cultural “transformation.” The People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment, or *Narkompros*, was the state agency in charge of this Soviet cultural transformation. Its first commissar, Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875-1933), believed that state institutions of culture should act as instructors and educate Soviet people to develop their own culture.¹⁹ Lunacharskii joined forces with the leaders of Proletkul’t movement, an artistic

¹⁶ “The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic: The objectives of the Department of Arts of the National Commissariat of Education” June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f.653, op.1, d.117, ll.70-2, 16.

¹⁷ For a view on the Bolshevik cultural policy as an extension of the colonial past, see Shahrani, “Soviet Central Asia and the Challenge of the Soviet Legacy,” 123-35.

¹⁸ Malashenko, “Islam versus Communism.” Malashenko has argued that Russian Orthodox culture suffered more institutional and cultural losses than that of Islamic cultures the USSR.

¹⁹ For a detailed account of Lunacharskii, see Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*.

movement that developed in the 1920s whose founders had considered the development of artistic culture a class-based phenomenon.²⁰ They defined art as a product of proletarian class culture that had to be created through collective action.

The definition of culture and the arts evolved between the Bolshevik Revolution and the apex of Stalinism, incorporating several key concepts.²¹ The discourse attempted to create a new Soviet population who was “cultured” in arts and literature, as well as in their everyday manners. Soviet people were to be well-versed in Marxist-Leninist ideas and in hand-picked pre-revolutionary and Western arts. In addition, since they would be living in collectives they needed to know how to behave in public. Being “cultured” (derived from the concept of *kul'turnost'* or “culturedness”) meant that the new Soviet man comprehended sophisticated pre-revolutionary literature (officially selected writers and poets such as Gorky and Pushkin) and, perhaps more importantly, did not get drunk and physically abuse his family when he returned home from the theater.²² The Soviet definition of culture was neither autonomous nor respectful of the indigenous social systems. On the contrary, it included so-called “civilized” behavior (possessing knowledge and having an interest in arts and literature) and rejected “uncivilized” behavior, such as “primitive” Kyrgyz nomadic living. The following report demonstrates how important it was to reshape Kyrgyz culture through adult education.

²⁰ But according to Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin believed that the original goals and work of the Proletkul't movement were “insufficiently linked with the general political tasks of the struggle;” the movement “did not do enough towards stimulating the consciousness of the masses, bringing workers to the fore, and preparing them for administration of the state through the medium of the Soviets.” This failure of the Proletkul't in appealing to the masses, or as Lenin put it, failure to be closer to the life of the masses, was one of the main factors that brought about its demise. See Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, 483. For an in-depth study of the Proletkul't movement, see Mally, *Culture of the Future*.

²¹ For the definitions of Stalinism, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism: New Directions*; Hoffmann, *Stalinism*; idem, *Stalinist Values*; Ward, *Stalin's Russia*; and Viola, *Contending with Stalinism*.

²² Volkov, 210-230.

Since the Thirteenth Congress, time has shown that a correctly managed reading house with favorable conditions in the National House is an extremely vital center. It is already rendering serious influence on cultural life in ails. The most urgent task is to develop and strengthen this work. Their main activity should be centered on the reading house and establish it as the center for the activities of the literary circles. Carefully developed adult education programs, centers of liquidation of illiteracy, and a school for adults of all sorts must be added to short-term practical activities. Reading of the newspapers, ails correspondence, and wall newspapers illuminates the importance of this location as the main place of the adult education. It is important to understand the environment of ails.²³

This report suggests that “understanding the environment of ails” meant equipping the managers with the tools to stamp out backwards ails traditions, and introducing a new way of living and being.

Islam and Nomadism: The First Targets of the Revolution

Islamic courts and schools, traditional nomadic institutions like the customary law, and localized familial customs like bride stealing also threatened the culture Soviets envisioned. Nomadism and Islam were the enemies of Soviet ideology. Since the Revolution, official policy toward Muslim religious leaders in Central Asia had been unclear and unorganized. During the Basmachi/Qurbashi war in the Fergana Valley, Bolsheviks had destroyed many mosques and madrasas. On February 25, 1922, exiled Ottoman and a Pan-Turkist leader Enver Pasha wrote in a private letter from Central Asia to his family that “the Bolsheviks turned this area to ruins and did not leave one house or a mosque standing.”²⁴ The Pan-Turkist and separatist motives of Enver Pasha may call

²³ “The Report of Jetti Su Regional Communist Party of Turkestan to the District Committees of the Party about the organization of cultural education work in the villages,” October 8, 1924. TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 70, l. 13.

²⁴ İnan, *Enver Paşa'nın Özel Mektupları*, 119. For number of mosques and madrasas, see Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*.

this account into question, but other evidence of the destruction of Muslim institutions in the Union of Militant Godless records confirms his account.²⁵

Paradoxically, the Soviet state's cultural activities attempted to penetrate into Kyrgyzstan by assaults on cultural mainstays such as religion and nomadism.²⁶

Although they spoke different languages, the Uzbek and Kyrgyz peoples saw their common religion, Islam, as unifying.²⁷ The *Allahsyzlar* or *Khudaisyzlar* union (The Union of Militant Godless or *Soiuz bezbozhnikov*) set to disintegrate the unity when they began their anti-Islam work in 1924 and launched an all-out assault against the faithful in 1927.²⁸ They began the anti-veiling campaign and persuaded the central government to issue a decree abolishing the *Shariat* (or *Sharia*) courts, madrasa (Islamic schools) and *waqf* (pious endowments).

Club documents showed that club managers spent much time and energy on socialist education events, which included anti-religious activities. Until the late 1920s, anti-religious activities appeared less organized in comparison to other events in official Kyrgyz Club Activity Reports, but in 1927 and 1928, anti-religious activity became a

²⁵ Archival records show that beginning in 1927, many European and indigenous revolutionaries participated in the conversion of mosques to Soviet buildings. My collected documents show petitions such conversions. For example, in 1936, in Tashkent a group of Uzbeks sent a petition to the Party in order to convert a village mosque into public bath. Another document showed that Tashkent mosques were turned into Red Teahouses, Red Clubs, a school and a cotton storage unit. TsGARUZ, f. 86, op. 10, d. 1110, l. 2, and f. 86, op. 10, d. 1111, l. 53. I owe these references to Olga Medvedeva, Ph.D.

²⁶ In this section, I draw on the literature on Soviet anti-religious campaigns: Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia*; Peris, *Storming the Heaven*; Husband, 'Godless Communists'; Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*; Alimova, "A Historian's Vision of 'Khudjum,'" 147-156; Carrère d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire*; Benningsen and Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*; Fletcher and Sergeyev, "Islam and Intolerance in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan," 251-276; Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor State*; Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş*; and Hayit, *Türkistan Milli Mücadele Tarihi*.

²⁷ Bociurkiw, "Nationalities and Soviet Policies," 148-154.

²⁸ For Soviet anti-religious policy in Central Asia, see Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*; Northrop, "Languages of Loyalty," 179-200; idem, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*; and Kamp, "Pilgrimage and Performance," 263-278.

routine part of the educational activities. One such report demonstrated each club's priorities:

Clubs have libraries. For each club library 250 rubles were given. The work of Red Yurts and ail reading rooms consisted of conducting of conversations, lectures, readings, and theatrical-artistic productions that appealed to local populations.

According to the data from Naryn oblast, in the winter of 1927-28, clubs carried out 232 reports, 87 lectures, 79 conversations, 28 readings. They handed out information and written educational statements to 756 peasants, and organized nine plays and parties (by nine Red Yurts.)

The average of attendance per day in the Red Yurts were five to ten people; in ail reading rooms 25 to 30 people. In ail reading rooms and Red Yurts, the *bezbozhnik* society organized a meeting for 260 active participants. Trade Unions, cooperatives, the Plowmen's Union and others organized Red Choikhonas in their premises.

In 1927 and 1928, 343 plays, concerts, and various celebrations were carried out, and 3,200 people participated in them. Sixty percent of the repertoires contained ideological content. Furthermore, in the summer, the students of the Kyrgyz National Studio visited southern oblasts and staged plays and concerts in the Kyrgyz language.²⁹

Anti-religious activity was listed simply as one of the educational events in a newspaper article that reported on club activities. It was not one of the priorities in Kyrgyz clubs, even at the height of the *hujum*, or the Soviet assault on Islam.³⁰ Ail reports prioritized agricultural problems and emphasized the importance of the sedentarization of Kyrgyz nomads.

In January 1928, the Karakol House of Asiatic Peasants began its activities of cultural and educational work. In and after January, their work schedule was developed and organized by a legal advice office with one employee. Between January and October, the House carried out 161 lectures and conversation on law, agriculture, medicine, anti-religion, and other issues.

²⁹ "The Report of central Political Education Committee of the Kyrgyz ASSR about the political education work in the republic," January 1, 1929, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 1, d. 229, ll. 52-55.

³⁰ See the Glossary.

During this time, 5,328 peasants were served. The House also participated in the following campaigns: sowing, agricultural tax collecting, and others. Currently, the House is setting up communication centers in ail reading rooms, Red Yurts and schools in Karakol.³¹

When regional Communist Parties in Central Asia expressed their opposition to state policies, the Party in Moscow swiftly replaced ethnic leadership with Russian or other Europeans. During this period in Kyrgyzstan, important national leaders such as Turar Ryskulov (also spelled "Riskul-uulu," 1894-1937) lost their positions to Russians because of their resistance to the sedentarization of nomadic populations. As it did across the USSR, the Party accused them of incompetence or counter-revolutionary activity and, a dozen years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the makeup of the Kyrgyz elite barely resembled that of the Pre-Revolution. By 1930, the Party had replaced virtually all the original Kyrgyz leadership.

By the end of the 1920s, the crackdown on religious leaders in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Central Asia became official. In 1929, "Law on Religious Associations of the RSFSR" established the regulation of all religious activities from Moscow. This centralizing move severely limited the number of "legitimate" religious associations and placed heavy financial burdens on them in the form of new taxes disguised as other expenses. Consequently, across Central Asia less hostile religious leaders became Soviet administrators while the anti-Russian and anti-Communist leaders lost their jobs. These same anti-Soviet leaders lost their lives in the purges of the late 1930s.

In the absence of "class enemies" such as bourgeois landlords in Kyrgyzstan, Soviet authorities targeted traditional customs (religious or not) and labeled religious

³¹ "Report on the work of Karakol House of Asiatic Peasants in 1928," 5.

laypeople as enemies of the people.³² Where the number of clergy was insignificant, as was often the case in Kyrgyzstan, authorities attacked religious laypeople. The situation in Central Asia was not unique; Soviet authorities in Russia regularly targeted religious practices and traditional behaviors. Even being married by a priest was considered surrendering to an ignorant past and made one suspect in the eyes of the authorities. Glennys Young has shown that local watchdogs of the state purged certain *Komsoml'tsy* for violating Communist "ethics" because these young people went to a priest to get married.³³ Soviet treatment of the mullahs and imams in Central Asia was no different than that of Orthodox priests in Russia.

Like the mullahs and imams, Kyrgyz *manaps* (clan elders) experienced drastic status transformation throughout the 1920s. In 1921, Lenin called for the legalization of private trade and manufacturing.³⁴ On the Central Asian front, the Soviet state considered Tatar and Uzbek imams and mullahs as the agents of NEP: *manaps* and "clergy-merchants:" these people were the "Nepmen" of Central Asia.³⁵ They were the same people whom the state, since Catherine the Great, had supported as the "civilizing" factors among the nomads. The Soviet state needed a new civilizing force that included secularized people in leadership positions in the smallest institutions such as the clubs. In Central Asian nomadic societies like that of Kyrgyz, NEP culture did not exist in the same way that it did in the European Soviet Union. Even the definition of the Nepmen in

³² Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia*, 253-271.

³³ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁴ As historian Alan Ball has shown, Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) created thousands of private entrepreneurs, called "Nepmen." Ball has also shown that once their usefulness came to an end, the Nepmen were liquidated at the end of the 1920s. For NEP and Nepmen, see Ball, *Russia's Last Capitalists*.

³⁵ Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 134.

Central Asia differed from that in Russia and the western Soviet Union. Among nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, clan leaders and wealthy herd-owners became Nepmen. The culture of the Nepmen was the traditional culture of nomadic Kyrgyz, and so a fight against the NEP culture was an attack on the traditional way of life. As a result, for the people of the Kyrgyz ASSR, the period of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) was a complex struggle.

According to official records, one of the hidden enemies among the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks was not the wealthy clan leaders but the ambiguous and interchangeable pre-Soviet communities like “Muslim,” “Turkestan,” “Turk,” or “Bukhari.” Soviet administrators found it difficult to categorize and manage these communities because most people of Kyrgyzstan identified themselves with multiple communities. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz could call themselves alternatively Muslim, Oshtuk (being from the Osh region), Bugu (belonging to a Kyrgyz tribe), Ichkilik (belonging to a clan), Kyrgyz, Sart (living a settled lifestyle), and so forth.

Soviet authorities viewed nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as merely less observant Muslims and so among them nomadism, rather than Islam, became the main target of transformation.³⁶ Although many nomads resisted and destroyed their own livestock, which condemned them to starvation and punishment, the sedentarization of nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz reached its apex in the late 1920s. Not everyone in Kyrgyzstan was nomadic. In emerging Soviet urban centers, a handful of intellectuals began to give a voice to city-dwelling Kyrgyz who began to adopt Soviet national designations. Kasym Tynystanov or Tynystan-uulu (1900-1934), a Kyrgyz literary and political leader,

³⁶ For the Soviet view on nomads, see Gellner, *State and Society in Soviet Thought*.

expressed his views in his newspaper *Erkin Too* (*Free Mountain*, 1924-) and the journal *Jangy Madaniyat Jolunda* (*On the Road to New Civilization*, 1928-1931).³⁷

Tynystanov and his Kyrgyz and Uzbek comrades adopted official postures of Kyrgyzness and Uzbekness, and led intellectual movements in the generation that came of age with the Bolshevik Revolution.³⁸

Once Central Asia was carved into national republics, indigenous intellectuals such as Tynystanov learned to operate within “distinct” national literary traditions.³⁹ Until this time, most Central Asians had rarely distinguished the Uzbek literary tradition, for example, as something different from Tajik tradition. This was a new era in education, literature and other cultural spheres and it demanded the separation of traditions that had been intertwined. In the late 1920s, two separate literary organizations emerged in Kyrgyzstan: one in the Kyrgyz language, *Kyzyl Uchkun* (*Red Spark*) and another in the Russian language, *KirAPP* or *Kirgizskaia Assotsiatsiia Proletarskikh Pisatelei* (Kyrgyz Association of Proletarian Writers). The Party shrewdly combined these two associations, subordinating the Kyrgyz writers to the main writers’ association in Moscow.⁴⁰ This move separated Kyrgyz writers from their Central Asian colleagues and aligned them instead with Russian and other European writers.

Throughout the 1920s, changes in education were as sweeping as the political, religious, and societal reorganization. Following the Revolution in the early 1920s,

³⁷ For Tynystanov’s work, see Tinistan uulu, *Ene Tilibiz*. Also see a recent novel on Tynystanov, written by Stanaliyev, *Kasym Tynystanov*.

³⁸ See Kasym Tynystanov (Figure 16) on page 87.

³⁹ Goble, “Readers, Writers, and Republics,” 131-147.

⁴⁰ Edward Allworth has emphasized that all ethnic writers had to recognize an official status under a national name: *KirAPP*. Allworth, *Central Asia*, 373.

secular education had replaced Islamic schools.⁴¹ Beginning in the mid-1920s, girls increasingly attended elementary school alongside boys. And on November 29, 1929, the Latin alphabet replaced the Persian-Arabic alphabet.⁴²

Cultural institutions such as clubs sprung up in most ails to introduce the cultural values of the Western USSR to the Central Asians. Various party organs of the state, like clubs and the *Komsomol*, began “agitating” workers in the early 1920s. According to club documents, in the mid to late 1920s they were able to reach the farthest pastures and smallest ails, such as those of Kök-Oirok.⁴³

Chui Komsomol members carried out valuable work among the nomad population of the pasture of Oktorgoi, Kok-Oirok and Komgur. They turned over the best pastures to the poor farmers. The herds of the bais and the manaps were moved to the grazing lands at the end of the Kök-Oirok pasture. Komsomol members also achieved great successes at the cultural front. In Oktorgoi pasture, they worked in the Red Yurt. In essence, it became the central school of the liquidation of illiteracy. Komsomol members, students and cadets of technical schools led this cultural work. During the summer, 1,000 people were trained, including 559 Kyrgyz women, 88 farmhands, 64 shepherds, and 167 Komsomol members. The successes at the pasture elevated the authority of the Komsomol. Farmhands and poor peasants’ children applied for Komsomol membership. One-hundred people were prepared for the enrolment into the Komsomol and nine peasants were sent away for Komsomol training.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For pre-revolutionary schools in Kyrgyzstan, see Aitmambetov, *Dorevoliutsionnye shkoly v Kirgizii*.

⁴² In 1940, Kyrgyz SSR replaced its Latin alphabet with Cyrillic script. Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*.

⁴³ According to official Soviet history, the first Komsomol work began in Kyrgyzstan in 1919, but the earliest attempts at cultural education work did not begin in ails until the 1920s. For more on official records, see Oruzbayeva, *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*. 186.

⁴⁴ “A report on about the successes of the cultural and educational work carried out by the Chui organization of VLKSM –All Union of Lenin Young Communist League at the pastures,” 2.

Official records show that even by late 1920s, the Komsomol's education work was not going smoothly.⁴⁵ The fact that the Komsomol had to "adapt their work to the local environment" meant all youth was not fully responding to the demands of the Komsomol.

Economic developments and socio-cultural changes occurred suddenly and simultaneously throughout Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Stalinism during the first and second Five-Year Plans (1927-1937) meant industrialization, collectivization, and purges in Kyrgyzstan. Rapid construction of thermal power stations in major urban centers, including the one in Frunze, accelerated the industrialization process of Central Asia. With the aid of new electrical power, processing and textile factories began to use cotton produced in newly collectivized fields. Central Asian industrialization of the 1930s, however, did not match the successes of the Western USSR and most successes were confined to the textile sector. Thus, collectivization received special attention from the authorities who wanted to improve the textile industry.⁴⁶

In Kyrgyzstan, collective farms that cultivated cotton never reached the same levels as those in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan because mountainous Kyrgyzstan was not as suitable for farming. As a result, in Kyrgyzstan collectivization focused on animal husbandry. Sedentarization of nomads and collectivization of shepherds went together,

⁴⁵ "A report on the political and educational work of the Komsomol in the Alamedin pastures," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, June 18, 1929, 4. "The Alamedin region has four pastures. The centers of these pastures are Chungurchak and Ken-Tür. In these central locations among the nomads, Komsomol members work as cultural and educational workers. At the center of the pastures, there is a Red Yurt, fully-equipped for educational work and an information desk. Komsomol members organize political and other circles to train young people, and recruit them into the Komsomol. They adapt their work to the ail environment. Their work at these pastures will be extended until September first."

⁴⁶ See, Sherstobitov, *Lenin i krestianstvo Sovetskogo Vostoka*; Nove and Newth, *The Soviet Middle East*; Rumer, *Central Asia in Transition*; Matley, "Industrialization (1865-1964)." Only during and after World War II, did other industries like coal-mining and steel production become viable in Central Asia. Evacuation of factories from the Western regions during WWII, and construction of hydroelectric power stations helped develop the industry of Central Asia.

and drastically changed the *turmush* (ordinary everyday lives) of Kyrgyz.⁴⁷

Furthermore, many of the aksakals and akyns who helped Kyrgyz to ground and legitimize their beloved nomadic culture were murdered during the purges in 1938.⁴⁸ As a result of these radical changes, people were told to see their community in a new light: less Kyrgyz, more Soviet.

The First Steps at Making Kyrgyz “Soviet”

The NEP years left a complex legacy in regard to Central Asia’s intellectual and cultural life. This was a period that brought some gains to intellectuals’ lives, but at the same time, the everyday culture of Central Asians suffered some losses. Adeb Khalid has pointed out that on the one hand, the Jadidists had been successful in introducing modernist ideas in their publications, new-method schools, and theaters.⁴⁹ They believed in abolishing the traditionally elitist categories that only allowed the upper echelons of society to be educated and cultured. On the other hand, the Kadimists still commended “status and prestige” in Central Asian societies, rejecting the modernist ideas of inclusion. The Muslim Communists, among whom were some Jadidists, took on the class-based ideology for their struggle against the representatives of the old regimes in the region.

⁴⁷ For example, the Soviets viewed the nomadic tradition of *barymta* as a serious threat to people’s liberation from their nomadic and backwards lifestyles. Well before the implementation of the Soviet legal policy, the Imperial Russian government had outlawed *barymta*, which included raiding the flocks of a debtor, or kidnapping his wife. See a detailed discussion on the Imperial treatment of the Kazakh inheritance traditions including the inheritance of wives in Virginia Martin, “Barimta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime,” 249-271.

⁴⁸ Khelimskaia, *Taina Chong-Tasha*.

⁴⁹ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 282.

Eventually, their views clashed with that of the Bolsheviks in Moscow. After the delimitation of 1924, most Jadidists and communists redefined themselves as “Muslim national communists.”⁵⁰ Their primary goal was to “modernize” Central Asian societies without losing the indigenous culture of each society.⁵¹ Their goals sometimes coincided with that of the government: modernizing schools, minimizing the role of Islam in education. Other times, they were at odds with the policies of the state, such as some of the most aggressive activities of the Godless, or attempts to regulate private sexual behavior.

Central Asian modernists and Communists learned to focus on the positive aspects of the Soviet ideology, hoping that their societies could benefit from this new system. They hoped that their children, like Russian children, would welcome a new future. The post-NEP era of the first Five-Year Plan was a period of hope for many children of the working class.⁵² The children of workers and peasants were expected to aid the Party to assert more influence. These young people would gain enough knowledge and confidence by way of vocational and technical education. The Party

⁵⁰ In 1924, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR inaugurated the reorganization of Central Asia into socialist republics. The Soviet Socialist Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were the first two new republics. The creation of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan as autonomous republics followed. Kyrgyz (formerly called Kara-Kyrgyz) and Kara-Kalpaks were not seen worthy enough to have their own autonomous republics. The Committee gradually elevated Kyrgyz territory from an autonomous region or oblast (1925) to an autonomous republic (1926) and finally, to “the ultimate honor” of Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (1936).

⁵¹ In his various works, Alexandre Benningsen referred to the Muslim intellectuals who followed the example of Mirsaid Sultangaliev, a Tatar intellectual as “Muslim national communists.” See Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*; and Koichiev, “Ethno-territorial claims in the Fergana Valley during the process of national delimitation, 1924-7,” 45-57.

⁵² Sheila Fitzpatrick argued that this era of “Cultural Revolution” initiated and legitimized the struggle against all the representatives of the pre-revolution and 1920s such as the bourgeois intelligentsia and their values. Fitzpatrick suggested that this era of cultural and intellectual revolution offered new educational and professional opportunities to the children of workers and peasants. This revolution meant to strengthen the Party’s control on cultural issues. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1932*, 129.

expected the new generation of the Cultural Revolution, in Sheila Fitzpatrick's terms, to be able to attend the universities and become the new Soviet elite.

The new generation played a significant role in rejecting what the Proletkul't had brought to the urban centers: jazz, vaudeville and other "contaminated" art.⁵³ The same generation in the new industrial centers of the peripheral areas shunned attending occasional motion pictures and listening to the radio broadcasts of jazz music. In the recent past, for many in the remote corners of the Union only a few books of detective stories and science fiction had represented the Proletkul't experience. The generation of the Cultural Revolution would have none of this.

In Central Asia, between 1927 and the mid 1930s, intellectual life continued to be both challenged and "improved." The Cultural Revolution opened the doors of higher education institutions to Central Asian young people. Since the creation of six new literary languages in 1924, an unprecedented number of newspapers and periodicals began circulating.⁵⁴ With the constant influx of Russian, Ukrainian and other European populations from the western Soviet Union, intellectual exchanges in Central Asia became more diverse. During the early 1930s, Almaty, Samarkand, Tashkent and Frunze became the hubs of intellectual development, establishing cultural institutions such as theaters, clubs and libraries. The proletarian writers' associations began to replace "Red" societies, now considered cosmopolitan and bourgeois. These new associations like

⁵³ Although Proletkul't gradually lost its momentum and state support, its ideas seeped into Stalinist concepts of culture. During the era of the "Cultural Revolution" (1928-1935), representatives of the Proletkul't movement who were considered "bourgeois elements" would be attacked and phased out. The new cultural landscape of the early 1930s brought about a militancy that transformed artists into official representatives of the Stalinist revolution from above. The primary function of these Soviet artists became the dissemination of Stalinist ideas among workers and peasants, who were soon to be collectivized.

⁵⁴ Huskey, "The Politics of Language in Kyrgyzstan," *Nationalities Papers* 23/3(1995): 549-72.

SAAPP (Central Asian Association of Proletarian Writers) and *KirAPP* were prepared to throw out Proletkul't trends and turn to Socialist Realism in literature.⁵⁵

The artistic trends of the 1920s remained under attack until 1932. During this period, the state channeled all its resources, most specifically the elbow grease of men and women, to the economy. The Soviet government claimed that with the heroic efforts of Soviet men and women, the industrial production drastically increased. The official rhetoric suggested that people gave up everything material, physical and emotional so that new industrial cities would spring up, even in the previously neglected regions. Many died so that electricity and railroads could reach the remotest areas. Shock workers (*udarniki*) of the 1929 shock-work campaign began to concentrate on accelerated agricultural and industrial production. Many workers competed with each other to earn various best-worker titles.⁵⁶

These elite workers had little or no time for entertainment, arts, and cultural events. This was the perfect atmosphere for the exclusion of any art form that seemed flashy or indulgent, meaning capitalist or foreign. The shock workers were only interested in austere types of entertainment that involved gatherings in workers' clubs and other Houses of Culture. These Communist enthusiasts took the initiative to attack any

⁵⁵ Note that between 1928 and 1932, during Stalin's "Great Change" or "Great Break" (*velikii perelom*), following the period that this chapter discusses, economic and social transformations seriously altered the state's cultural policies. The post-revolutionary NEP came to an end, bringing down the Nepman and his culture. This meant that all private enterprises and the tolerated cultural freedoms were to disappear. In place of the inclusive and creative NEP culture, Soviet citizens were to embrace more unified and "proletarian" culture. This new culture was exclusively worker- and peasant-centered, rejecting the values and goals of the original Proletkul'tist. See Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 64.

⁵⁶ Hiroaki Kuromiya has pointed out that the shock workers had little patience for the older workers and the peasant new-comers on the factory floor. Young males who had been working since the Revolution and the Civil War wanted faster and more "modern" co-workers and factories. Kuromiya sees these driven workers as "the symbol of a new society." See Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 114-5.

art form that recalled the 1920s.⁵⁷ Their actions were often spontaneous, such as stopping plays in theaters. They saw themselves as the agents of cultural change and therefore took radical and aggressive actions that would occasionally go against the Party's plans.

In Kyrgyzstan too, the new generation of intellectuals who identified with proletarian values denounced the frivolous literary culture, both written and oral, of their predecessors, focusing their attention on the ideological demands of the Party. Allworth has demonstrated how extreme this rejection of the past was. He argued that many Central Asian writers publicly recanted and confessed their own ideological "sins."⁵⁸ Younger writers, witnessing the humiliation of the elders, made sure to write on the glories of industrialization and collectivization. Such anti-intellectual attitudes ruled the day throughout the first Five-Year Plan period. Ideological uniformity demanded unity in intellectual expression. In Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz and Uzbek writers of the period wrote stories that were stripped of any individual creativity or cultural community. This was also the period of alphabet changes, literacy drives, women's liberation campaigns, and Russian language education in schools.⁵⁹ The new generation of potential intellectuals had a host of new issues to absorb.

Nonetheless, about a year before the end of the Second Five-Year Plan, the ascetic cultural atmosphere of shock workers began to allow a more festive tone. First of

⁵⁷ Fitzpatrick described the attitude of Communist youth as "an iconoclastic and belligerent youth movement." Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 131.

⁵⁸ Allworth, *Central Asia*, 380-81.

⁵⁹ Anderson and Silver, "Some Factors in the Linguistic and Ethnic Russification of Soviet Nationalities: Is Everyone Becoming Russian?" 95-130. The Soviet government introduced a Latin-based Kyrgyz alphabet in 1928. Only in 1941 did the Kyrgyz language adopt the Cyrillic script.

all, Stalin made it clear to the enthusiastic cultural revolutionaries of the late 1920s that they went too far with their fight against their elder revolutionaries. Stalin and his top-ranking Party members rebuffed such radical, almost utopian ideas as the removal of all Western European art forms from Soviet art. Cultural commissar Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948) advocated a more inclusive and all-embracing society.⁶⁰ A single Union of Soviet Writers, with Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) as its leader, invited writers of all nationalities to respond to the creation of a new, all-inclusive Soviet literature. The Soviet Union was on its way to becoming a nation, and the intelligentsia, including the writers, needed to support this renewal. As a result, the official cultural discourse of socialist realism would be the language of renewal.

Socialist realism required Kyrgyz writers and poets to demonstrate in their work that the hard work of Soviet citizens, like the shock workers, was paying off. According to the official rhetoric, these Kyrgyz citizens had a right to dream about a bright future. Soviet politicians expected their compatriot Kyrgyz artists to show people that their dreams would become a reality. Kyrgyz literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s, for example, produced works that celebrated the people's hard work, promising a great future. In the 1920s, Kyrgyz poets and writers such as Toktogul Satylganov, Togolok Moldo, and Aaly Tokonbayev were producing literature which praised the Soviet regime. In the visual arts, the era of socialist reality produced paintings and sculptures of robust and cheerful Kyrgyz people and landscapes.⁶¹ Clubs and other cultural venues such as

⁶⁰ Richard Taylor has pointed out that the new Union of Soviet Writers was a good example of such inclusive culture. Taylor, "But Eastward, Look, the Land is Brighter," 202.

⁶¹ In the 1920s and early 1930s, artists, such as S. A. Chuikov, G. Ayitiev and S. Akilbekov produced most of the paintings and sculptures in Kyrgyzstan.

festivals and cultural Olympiads became central arenas of collective celebration. As we will see in the following chapters, all of these activities were producing a new Kyrgyz community which was beginning to look Kyrgyz in form, but Soviet in content.



FIGURE 16: Kasym Tynystanov, source: www.numismondo.com.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOVIET HOUSES OF CULTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN

Tanabai examined the rusty fetters and admired the master's handiwork. The craftsmanship on the fetters showed the talent and the legacy of the old Kyrgyz masters. This beautiful craft is forgotten now, all but lost. There is no one or need to continue on the tradition. Many other valuable traditions have been lost too.

Tanabai did not know whom to blame for the disappearance of his people's handicrafts. After all, when he was young, he himself was the one who spoke against the small artisans. He was the one who, once at a Komsomol meeting, gave a long speech on abolishing the bozüi, as he saw them as holdouts from the pre-revolutionary ways. He was the one who fought against those who defended the bozüi. He was the one who yelled: "Down with the bozüi, down with the old ways."¹

In this excerpt, Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov's character Tanabai Bakasov, a former Kyrgyz Komsomol leader, kolkhoz worker, ardent believer in communist ideals, and a war veteran expresses his conflicting sentiments about his own heritage. Like many Kyrgyz people of his generation who matured during the Bolshevik Revolution, Tanabai believed in cultural revolution.² But like many of his countrymen, he was torn between the constructive and destructive effects of the revolution. In his short story *Gülsarat*, Aitmatov gives voice to Kyrgyz people like Tanabai who, while initially believing in the promises of cultural revolution, eventually became ambivalent, if not conflicted, about its contradictory results. In fact, many Kyrgyz regional and ail leaders had been active participants in the process of replacing bozüi with concrete houses, and collective farms

¹ Aitmatov, *Gulsarat*, 168-169. The original short novel, titled *Proshchai Gulsary!* was published in Russian in 1966.

² As discussed in the introduction the definition of "cultural revolution" here is in agreement with that of Michael David-Fox: the intertwined project of fashioning Soviet individuals as revolutionary vanguards and conscious Soviet citizens. The project is to create Soviet citizenry who internalize Soviet cultural missions and begin to see themselves as cultured and developed people. See David-Fox, "What is Cultural Revolution?"

in the center of the time-honored ail. They also helped the government build clubs in which taught contemporary western arts in place of indigenous Kyrgyz crafts were taught to both old and young.³ By the 1960s and the end of the Soviet era, Kyrgyz revolutionaries like Tanabai acknowledged that they themselves played an important role in the destruction of their traditions. Another Kyrgyz author, Kazat Akmatov, criticized both the system and Kyrgyz revolutionaries for turning away from Kyrgyz heritage, which defined their community.⁴ Most importantly, Aitmatov's politically ambivalent story, written in 1966, demonstrated that Kyrgyz people responded to cultural revolution in their country with a sense of reluctance.

In fact, the visual, literary and performing art works produced in the mid-twentieth century contradict the sentiments of this fictional character and his real-life counterparts. Paintings, sculpture, poetry, short stories and novellas (including Aitmatov's work), and musical productions of the post-revolutionary period indicate that Kyrgyz traditions did not completely disappear due to so-called cultural transformation. For example, Kyrgyz metal workers continued producing fetters for their horses, but learned to standardize their products in accordance with kolkhoz requirements. Their art had not disappeared; rather it had changed into something that was more suitable for modern life. Old masters gave way to new workers. Workers also altered their familiar everyday habits to fit post-revolutionary ways of living. Such interactions of Kyrgyz people with the state indicate that there was no clear dichotomy between the "developed"

³ See samples of Kyrgyz artisans' metalwork (Figure 17) on page 146.

⁴ Regarding discussions of frank self-criticism of Kyrgyz intellectuals, see the play by Aitmatov and Mukhamedjanov, *The Ascent of Mount Fuji*; and a novel by Akmatov, *Kündü ailangan jyldar*.

and the “backwards.”⁵ In other words, as the process of cultural revolution confronted the indigenous Kyrgyz way of life, it did not necessarily result in the complete transformation of it.

The Kyrgyz were not passive victims of a system that forced them to abandon everything they knew. On the contrary, they were participants in the production of a cultural revolution that helped them fashion a contemporary community within Soviet standards. They contributed to the state’s policies of cultural revolution through limited power relations with the Party. Even those who were ail administrators could only assert power as far as the Party allowed them.⁶ Nonetheless, cultural institutions such as clubs played an important role in eliciting participation from ail populations. The main contribution of ail leaders in clubs manifested itself in complaints about conditions on the ground and collaboration with regional offices. Ail leaders repeatedly appealed to regional administrators to respond to their ails’ needs.⁷

This chapter examines the earliest steps in the creation of Houses of Culture: Red Yurts, Red Teahouses, and Workers’ Clubs. It is based on an analysis of the correspondence between ail administrators in various ails and cities, regional (oblast) offices in republic capitals, and the central offices in Pishpek and Almaty. This correspondence, which includes manuals, declarations, and reports, shows that while attempting to fulfill official requirements, ail administrators constantly communicated to

⁵ For an analysis of the process of colonization as a confrontation between the modern and traditional, see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

⁶ For a discussion on the limitations of power relations between the state and society, see Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

⁷ Following anthropologist Talal Asad’s model, I use the terms “ail” or “indigenous” in place of “local.” For a discussion on the usage of the term “local,” see Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*. 3 and 7-9.

regional administrators that their localities had specific needs. Written records indicate that ail officials did not simply implement the directives and policies of the regional administrators. On the contrary, they expressed their needs, and grievances, and made specific requests.⁸

Club administrators and members manipulated the Soviet system within the limits the system allowed them, attempting to negotiate with the state about how Kyrgyz cultural community should be defined. During the 1920s and 1930s, titular nationalities began to receive most of the official attention and the resources from Moscow. Kyrgyz titular cadres, like all leading nationalities of each republic, gradually gained access to higher positions.⁹ The static definition of ethnically-based-nationalities gave Kyrgyz cadres mobility. Towards the end of the 1930s, they learned to use their ail connections and their knowledge of Soviet political behavior to move up in the system. They struggled to define, perform, and enforce Kyrgyzness within this new system. In the process, a new, contested and instable meaning of Kyrgyzness began to emerge.

The Origins of Kyrgyz Clubs

In February 1918, a resolution of the First All-City Conference of Cultural Organizations in Moscow announced that: "The workers' club must become a center for the worker's whole cultural life by serving as a place of relaxation, sensible entertainment

⁸ Chapter Four explores how Bolshevik and Stalinist festivals placed ail cultures on stage. One significant way in which regional and central administrators responded to ails' requests came in the form of cultural festivals. Higher administrators recognized that individual cultural traditions had to be acknowledged and celebrated in national festivals in Almaty and Moscow.

⁹ Gleason, "The Political Economy of Dependency under Socialism," 332-53.

and education.”¹⁰ The key words in this special resolution were “common activity,” “feeling of solidarity,” “kindling the understanding of socialism,” and “backward elements of the proletariat.” Club members were supposed to incorporate socialist education (teaching proletarian consciousness, Marxism, honoring the working people) with sensible entertainment (concerts, opera, plays, literary evenings, lectures, and discussions).¹¹ Gabriele Gorzka has shown that the members of workers’ clubs during the period between 1917-1921 (War Communism) altered the activities of clubs according to their *byt* (everyday living and habits). Gorzka has provided convincing evidence to demonstrate that clubs became places of refuge for their members during this period of extreme hardship, food shortages, and long working hours. She has pointed out

¹⁰ Gorzka, “Proletarian Culture in Practice: Workers’ Clubs, 1917-1921,” 29.

¹¹ The Ten Commandments for Club Members (I have found this reference thanks to Gabriele Gorzka’s above mentioned article, and re-worked the translation.)

1. The club is the foundation for your development, as it trains and strengthens your class-consciousness.
2. It helps you experience and understand important events in your country, as well as in the whole world, and guides you towards the salvation of our time, that is communism.
3. It develops your personal initiative and makes you a conscious, determined worker of the Soviet Republic.
4. It develops in you a feeling of community and collectivity, and teaches you to honor work and working people more than ever.
5. Honor your club and do not give into any kind of rough behavior, uphold cleanliness, order, and organization.
6. Do not waste your assets on spiritual forces, but develop and deepen them: register for a science club circle, whether it would be courses in Marxism, history, literature, drama, choir, or music.
7. Do not mistake the workers’ club for the old, bourgeois club where one played cards, danced, and drank alcohol. The workers’ club offers you sensible entertainment: concerts, opera, performances, literary evenings, stage productions, lectures, and discussions on various topics.
8. Do not waste your time on silly and empty pastimes, instead go to your clubs and sharpen your sense of humor and wit.
9. Do not put all the blame on your club if you observe that it is not working properly. Do not forget that every member must make a contribution to the common work. If the club is working badly, not only the administration is at fault, but the general council of members, which allows disorder, misuse, and laziness in the club.
10. Do not suggest that the Soviet power economizes on expenses for your further education: the Central Department finances the clubs and the performances. Concerts, lectures as well as scientific and artistic attractions are free of charge for club members.

Source: “Desiat’ zapovedei dlia chlenov kluba,” 14.

that clubs offered their members “a second home,” away from the discomforts of their cold and cramped dwellings.¹² But, most importantly, she has argued that club members made these poorly run institutions their own. Taking advantage of the absence of state organization and control, the people integrated their own tastes and activities, such as vodka-drinking or balalaika-playing, into officially-sanctioned functions.

During NEP, following War Communism, clubs attempted to emphasize more collective and political events within their activities. Clubs had come to be driven by personal and local initiatives and tastes in the early 1920s. Club administrators, mostly member-elected, began to organize political study circles (*kruzhki*), educational excursions, lectures, and plays on the ideological development of workers. They also organized film screenings whenever they could obtain new documentaries and feature films. All clubs had libraries or reading rooms where they organized “Lenin Corners.” John Hatch’s study on the Moscow Workers’ Club has shown that despite the efforts of the administrators to bring politics to the fore, the activities of the politically-oriented circles declined. Hatch has demonstrated that in the Workers’ Clubs of Moscow most of the specialized circles encouraged performing arts and physical culture.¹³ His study of clubs between 1925 and 1928 has pointed to a conclusion similar to Gorzka’s. Clubs became common places where workers “hung out” particularly because most were under the age of twenty-three (in some cases two-thirds of the members were younger than eighteen). Most young workers, including the non-members of clubs, began to attend

¹² Ibid., 49-51.

¹³ Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers: State, Class and Culture in Moscow’s Worker’s Club Movement, 1925-1928,” 97-117.

clubs just to see feature films or take part in dances rather than to participate in political education.

According to the findings of Gorzka and Hatch, in RSFSR the official rhetoric on club activities during the War Communism and NEP periods pointed to a discourse of political education and enlightenment of members. The practice in clubs, however, failed to maintain such high ideals. The clubs of the NEP period, therefore, turned out to be anything but centers of socialist education. The workers resisted the intended purpose of these clubs, making them their own.¹⁴

In Kyrgyzstan, the discourse on activities of clubs indicates that the “civilizing” mission took a different form. Official regulations, however, did not differ in Kyrgyz clubs from that of RSFSR. They all received the same basic official correspondence regarding activities and goals. Regional reports, coming from Almaty or Pishpek (contemporary capital Bishkek), however, added various activities, specific to Central Asia and/or Kyrgyzstan. Women’s liberation, girls’ education, nomads’ sedentarization, and shepherd’s transformations into more productive workers were a few of the activities that the state expected clubs to undertake. The objectives of the Kyrgyz Education Department Commissars in a 1921 report stated:

Clubs must work in connection with the transformation of daily life, insert arts and industry into the society, and increase the artistic level of workers such as the weavers, carpet-makers, and ceramic-makers alike. Clubs should encourage master artists to visit the largest industrial associations, schools, and worker unions, to organize problem-solving workshops, and send out outstanding workers as instructors.¹⁵

¹⁴ For the concept of “everyday resistance,” see Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

¹⁵ “The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic: The objectives of the Department of Arts of the National Commissariat of Education,” June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 117, ll. 70-2, and 15.

Clubs, in other words, needed to use all artists and master artisans to disseminate information to larger populations. Artists' and artisans' traditionally solitary work needed to become the common property of the masses.

Kyrgyz clubs promised their members "improvement" and "development." They rejected the "backwards" and the "ignorant," in other words, the indigenous.

Development meant a new way of being for Kyrgyz people, which would bring to them among other things, higher education and economic, social and cultural prosperity. Led by a policy of ideological education, this new way of being would transform Kyrgyz people into Soviet citizens. The language of club documents used the term "improvement," which meant disengagement with the past. In 1925, a report of Kyrgyz ASSR Political Education Committee explicitly expressed that the Houses had already achieved such disengagement with the past:

By the first anniversary of the delimitation of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast the Houses of Peasants succeeded in erasing the dregs of the stagnant and old ancestral ways of living by engaging in mass cultural and educational work, and by penetrating into the rural masses, armed with knowledge, schooling, and daily education.¹⁶

The distrust of indigenous customs and all histories dominated the cultural transformation policies of the Soviet clubs. Bruce Grant has pointed out that the Soviets "charged into the modern" so that they could shed their backwards history and image.¹⁷ According to the Soviets, however, the backwardness did not belong only to the Russian past. Official Soviet national hegemony ranked the Siberian peoples such as Nivkhi and Central Asian

¹⁶ "The Report of the Political Education Committee of Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast on the accomplished work in October and November of 1925," December 8, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f.647, op.1, d.114, ll.1-3

¹⁷ Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture*, 3.

nomads such as Kyrgyz in the bottom. There was no place for their past and traditions. As Grant suggested, Soviets constructed a cultural and social transformation for the nationalities such as Nivkhi that “hinged on a willed negation of the past.”¹⁸

The year 1918 was a landmark year of many “firsts” for Central Asia’s clubs: the first drama circle in Frunze; the first jazz band in Kyzyl Kyia; and the first Tatar and Uzbek language stage performances in Karakol. In 1920, the first Kyrgyz language play was staged in Cholpon-Ata. In 1925, the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast had eight clubs, four drama circles, twenty Red Choikhonas (teahouses) and forty Red Yurts. At the beginning, ail clubs met in kolkhoz and sovkhoz halls, and Red Yurts and Choikhonas in assembly halls of factories, plants. (In 1953, when there were 704 Houses of Culture, most of the city clubs and Houses and Palaces of Culture, multi-functional activity centers with large stages and movie theaters, had their own buildings.)¹⁹ By the end of the Stalinist Era, every small settlement in the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic had at least one room where the ‘masses’ were entertained while they were, in theory, educated.

Requirements in club manuals reflect the official revolutionary education policy in Central Asia. Even if the revolution could not take place as gradually as Lenin might have liked, at least it was to appeal to regional populations. The first club activity manuals, which Party administrators composed and regional and ail administrators implemented, emphasized cultural and educational activities. These activities were to be initiated by three main institutions of the new Soviet regime: the educational organs of the Communist Party and all the relevant state institutions; the worker’s collectives and

¹⁸ Ibid., 158.

¹⁹ For more details, see Daniyarov, *Osushchestvlenie Leninskoi programmy kul'turnoi revoliutsii v Kirgizii*.

schools; and the institutions of leisure such as the clubs, libraries, museums, cinemas, sports centers, sanatoriums, excursion-tourism offices and parks.²⁰ The principal list of activities in these establishments were to include: educating the Soviet people on communist ideals and principles, introducing “a scientific approach” to culture, acknowledging the cultural diversity of a given region and treating the populations accordingly, teaching the populations to work collectively, working with individuals to instill an organized and group-conscious work ethic, and most importantly integrating all culture with these new approaches.

According to the manuals, the Soviet club, like the rest of the cultural and educational institutions, needed to develop creative methods to “improve” the culture of the Soviet people. These clubs were expected to encourage individual initiative among workers and peasants to educate their own local populations. For example, after attending inspirational lectures at clubs, young Kyrgyz and Uzbek workers and peasants were to convince their elderly parents and younger siblings at home that socialist ideals were good for the whole family and the community. The members of clubs, therefore, were supposed to discover abilities hidden within their own populations and elevate talented amateurs to lead various cultural activities of clubs. The manuals made it clear that the Party needed to monitor closely all of this activity.

On June 21, 1921, the Turkestan Narkompros passed a resolution that outlined their objectives. Although the Party’s attitudes regarding the nationalities shifted considerably during the first twenty years of the Soviet rule, at the beginning of the 1920s, the commissars attempted to apply similar policies towards the arts everywhere in

²⁰ For the dual nature of Soviet state and the Party structure see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

the union. Recognizing the assumed superiority of Russian colonial art in non-Russian regions, the commissars needed to address this imposed hierarchy. The commissars first defined the existing legacy of the art and culture of imperial Russia. They condemned Russian “capitalist art” as “bourgeois art.” They banned “art for art’s sake” and attacked the notion of the artist as a prophet who dominates the art world. From that time on, the consciousness of the working class would lead the way to an environment in which the arts would reflect the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The art of the Soviet people must respond vigorously and assuredly to the needs of working people.²¹ The artist could not remain a privileged and spoiled entertainer of the bourgeoisie. Also, the artist would have to serve society as an organizer, propagandist, and advocate for workers’ rights; the artist’s work would not be the ultimate goal. A sculptor, for example, must concentrate on creating a sculpture that both reflects and serves the people’s needs. As a result, the artist must view his artwork as a tool for the betterment of society rather than a masterpiece to be admired. For artists, the betterment of their communities meant making it a truly socialist society.

According to the commissars and the official ideology, the task of redefining art and artist in Turkestan was more difficult because according to them imperial Russian policies had robbed the ail populations of indigenous cultural growth. The commissars declared that colonial administrators had intentionally kept the ail traditions “feudal and patriarchal.”²² They argued that Central Asian populations had no tradition of profiting from art before the arrival of colonial power; the indigenous people produced art for the

²¹ “The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic,” June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 1417, ll. 70-72.

²² Ibid.

European bourgeois colonizers. The official language on Central Asian art concluded that it was Russian and other outside colonizers who had made Turkestani art into a commodity. The commissars declared that builders of socialism in Turkestan had to fight this “slavish art” that was created to please the aesthetic whims of wealthy outsiders. In addition, they had to teach people to return to their roots and recapture the originality of their own artistic traditions. This would be the only appropriate way to serve their people.

In summary, the resolution of June 1921 set out two objectives for cultural organizations in Turkestan. First, the organizations must “awaken and assist” enthusiastic amateurs (*samodeiatel'*) in taking charge of “the creative forces” in their areas. Second, they must encourage these enthusiasts and amateurs to “revolutionize the existing creativity” of the populations. The existing traditions included oral epic recitation, folk songs, carpet-weaving, felt-making and other textile arts, and pottery.²³ The resolution insisted that new themes relating to the “dictatorship of the proletariat” should be introduced to artists in all fields. Most pointedly, the resolution stated that such introductions should not be left only to schools. Here, the resolution assigned responsibility to the clubs as houses of the new culture. It required ail amateurs (or enthusiasts) to assist state administrators in setting up clubs so that revolutionary art workshops would have a home. Clubs were to be the centers of distribution from which samples of revolutionary art would be disseminated.

The establishment of clubs during the late 1920s and early 1930s attempted to facilitate significant changes in the social structure of ails and to create new everyday

²³ Ibid.

practices that possessed both regional (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and other) and revolutionary features. Soviet regulations required sedentarization, women's liberation, mandatory schooling, and party membership to be integral in the creation of clubs. Participants of clubs forged an active movement that was an amalgamation of many cultural expressions, both indigenous and imported. This new and amalgamated movement reflected the complexities of the exchange between central authorities and ail leaders. Ail leaders knew the meaning of Kyrgyz or Uzbek ethnicity, but learned to translate the meaning of revolutionary culture into their own idiom.²⁴ They learned to translate, both literally and figuratively, sophisticated and foreign words of the revolution into their own languages. After all, during the early years of the revolutionary twentieth century, Turkic and Muslim revolutionary trends had left their own regional imprint on ail leaders.²⁵ Furthermore, in Kyrgyz culture the idea of revolution existed within its own genealogies based on ancient epics such as *Manas*.²⁶

In most ails, the new Soviet administrators came from the ranks of re-revolutionary leaders already established in the community. They were respectable men and, in a handful of cases, women. Ail populations turned to the elderly and the wise, namely aksakals, when they needed to make a change in their traditional ways of living.

²⁴ Here I draw upon the work of Figes and Kolonitskii, who have shown how Russian peasants used and reinterpreted revolutionary language and symbols. They examine the ways in which Russian masses received and transformed the revolutionary discourse. See Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*.

²⁵ For regional revolutionaries, see Il'iasov, *Ocherki po istorii dorevoliutsionnogo Kirgizstana*; Karimov, *Abdulhamid Sulaymon oghli Cholpon*; Kasymov, "Iz istorii musul'manskikh kommunisticheskikh organizatsii v Turkestane v 1919-1920 godakh;" and Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*.

²⁶ In fact, revolution and enlightenment are two of the main themes of Kyrgyz oral epics such as *Manas*. For more on epic themes see Musayev, *Epos Manas*.

On the entertainment front, one of the activities involved the alteration of akyns' entertainment styles. Administrators knew that akyns were highly influential, and that ail populations took their words seriously. Their songs brought both entertainment and guidance. Traditionally, the Kyrgyz did not have to leave their nomadic encampments to be entertained. For them, entertainment and education went hand-in-hand. Aksakals of each ail educated the children and resident or traveling akyns (often respected as much as elders) entertained them. Uzbeks, who lived in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, also relied on private and family gatherings for entertainment and celebrations. Uzbeks sent their sons to madrasas and educated their daughters at home.²⁷ In both Uzbek and Kyrgyz cases, the revered functions of aksakals and akyns overlapped, blurring the lines between entertainment and education, something the Soviet Houses of Culture perpetuated.

This dual function of aksakals and akyns served the Party's efforts to assert political power. These leaders of Kyrgyz society may be called, in Gramscian terms, "organic intellectuals" who emerged from within ail communities.²⁸ But more appropriately, in indigenous terminology, they are the *myrza*, whose role in society was that of teacher, mentor, and leader, rolled into one. While gathering allies from the society to establish clubs as institutions of cultural revolution, the Party often attempted to recruit elders. As a result, various *myrza* demonstrated, imposed and implemented varying degrees of power in this process of revolutionizing Kyrgyz culture. The way in

²⁷ For details on ail traditions, see Abdyldaev, *Azyrki ail madaniiaty*.

²⁸ For descriptions of adult education and organic intellectuals see Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*.

which these groups asserted power was not always clear, because the boundary between the producers and receivers of club culture in small ails often overlapped.

One such aksakal was Ismail Mongkoev (1899-1976). Mongkoev of Jerge Tal ail in Naryn oblast served in the Red Army in 1918, became a Komsomol leader in 1920, and “enlightened his people” as an award-winning teacher between 1922 and 1959.²⁹ Revered men like Mongkoev were often shepherds turned managers, or teachers and activists who helped to legitimize a political system in the smallest ails. They petitioned the state for solutions to an ail’s problems and needs in exchange for assisting the state in creating institutions such as clubs. As a result, the administrators of ail clubs became the inventors of new and revolutionary traditions.³⁰ These Kyrgyz shepherds who became educators moved from being implicit participants of mundane activities to active and conscious makers of Soviet Kyrgyz culture.³¹ As Antonio Gramsci would argue, political adult education enables learners to move from ‘common sense’ to ‘good sense,’ meaning gaining consciousness of their social and economic environment.³² Paulo Freire would further the ideal of ‘good sense’ and argue that in an ideal adult education process, learners once involved in the process, would be able to see the social problems in their own societies.³³ In Kyrgyz clubs, in other words, the ideal result would be that Kyrgyz

²⁹ Asanov, *Naryn Oblusu Entsiklopediya*, 295

³⁰ For a discussion on how modern revolutionary and nationalist traditions have been invented see Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

³¹ My analyses are informed by the adult education theories of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire. Mayo, *Gramsci, Freire & Adult Education*; Crehan, *Gramsci*; Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*; and Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

³² Mayo, *Gramsci, Freire & Adult Education, Possibilities for Transformative Action*, 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 74.

nomads would learn to engage in an ongoing process of collective learning to remake their own community.³⁴

The discourse of Kyrgyz club administrators showed that they were attempting to create a new culture that incorporated a multiplicity of experiences. First, they were trying to follow the orders of the Party. Second, they needed to observe and report the responses of their ail populations. Third, in the 1930s, they needed to learn to deal with the oppressive power of the Stalinist system, its various purges, and in the 1940s, the Second World War. Clubs participated in many of these experiences, shifting their focus to facilitate the political changes. Club documents indicated that their primary concern was education and entertainment. They were, however, at the center of political and social activity and change. As we will now see, the issues that ail clubs administrators chose to address in their reports indicated that clubs were small laboratories that participated in and advanced the changes in the economy, politics and culture of the Soviet Union.

The Civilizing Mission of Clubs

The possibility of revolutionizing and improving the complex and diverse cultures of Turkestan was limited by the reality that there were very few ail members who were qualified to take on the task. Therefore, the Party leaders took seriously the hiring of each administrator or opening of each new club. The newspaper *Izvestiia* began reporting the opening of clubs in Turkestan as early as 1922. On March 2, 1922, it reported from Alma-Ata that in Naryn, located in what is today northeastern Kyrgyzstan, workers

³⁴ For a discussion on the constant process of self-fashioning, see Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931-9."

initiated the first club of the region and began cultural, educational and political work. Their enormous task included finding artists to “introduce” western European forms of art, finding revolutionaries to “revolutionize” existing forms of art, and finding educators to “improve” the old culture. The commissars nominated volunteers among the workers for this enormous job. These volunteers took on the task in ails and traveling workshops and exhibits. Ideally, all this was to take place at the initiative of the workers themselves.³⁵

Regional administrators intended to use the clubs to educate ail populations and convince them to abandon rituals based on nomadic, pre-Islamic, and Islamic traditions. Correspondence between central and regional administrators indicates that ail administrators repeatedly warned the central administration of specific parochial problems associated with implementing these reforms. In addition, they did not hesitate to point out the deficiencies in their resources to carry out the reforms, often citing lack of money as a barrier to implementation.

Stalin’s industrialization, collectivization, and cultural policies attempted to revolutionize Soviet society, including that of Kyrgyz, into a society contemporary with the industrialized world. This revolution promised Kyrgyz a place among the developed societies of the world. The language of club documents reflected this sentiment. They praised Soviet development of all kinds and demeaned Kyrgyz ways of being. They implied that Kyrgyz people would not become a “developed” nation unless they gave up their indigenous culture. Due to the Stalinist cultural policies of the 1930s, however, the

³⁵ *Izvestiia*, 2 March 1922, 5.

definition of a contemporary nation or nationality evolved into something different.

The Party's attitude toward indigenous cultures changed. Terry Martin has argued that in the 1930s, the Bolsheviks moved away from seeing nations as modern and created Soviet nationalities in their own individual primordial characters.³⁶ The change is apparent in club functions and the Olympiads of the 1930s and 40s.

In the 1920s, club administrators identified Kyrgyz and Uzbek social and cultural traditions as the primary targets for change. Traditions seen as in need of reform included engagement, marriage and funeral rites, recitation of national and ancestral myths, and oral narratives of imagined history. The enormous task of revolutionary work in cultural and social spheres had another layer in Turkestan: club administrators were faced with the delicate act of introducing a new culture without alienating the ail populations. Turkestan was the "East" while areas like Christian Ukraine, or even Muslim Tatarstan, were considered the "West." Administrators assumed that a Central Asian would not be as familiar with "Western culture" as a Christian Ukrainian or a Muslim Tatar.

In an attempt to "civilize" the "Eastern people" of Kyrgyzstan, a resolution dictated that the "past achievements of western European art" must be introduced in the area.³⁷ But, there was an important caveat imbedded within the resolution in the form of a most remarkable sentence: it ordered that western European art must be introduced "without imposing alien forms" on existing social and cultural traditions and art forms.³⁸

³⁶ Martin, "Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," 161-182.

³⁷ "The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic," June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 1417, ll. 70-72.

³⁸ Ibid.

Examples cited by the commissars included sound harmony and popular theater.

Revolutionary songs, posters, and plays were the most highly recommended ways to introduce the new art forms and the new socialist ideals. The ideal space for all these activities was the clubs and Red Choikhonas because these they were located either within a factory or farm. In addition, tearooms would function as familiar venues where new ideas were introduced. In other words, the resolution demanded that the club administrators learn to incorporate indigenous arts with new.

Kyrgyz club reports reflected the Bolshevik view that the modern production of art was common property. Club administrators reported the activities of the various nationalities in their regions, perhaps adhering to the Bolshevik concept of universalizing culture by addressing the tastes of all ethnicities and nationalities. Let us look at the main problems that regional administrators saw as obstacles on the route to cultural revolution.

The Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee report on 18 October 1925 revealed that there were serious problems to tackle.³⁹ As in European regions of the Soviet Union, the education efforts of ail administrators encountered many obstacles in Kirghizia. First, there were too few newspapers such as *Erkin Too*, *Ak Jol (White Path)*, *Kazakhstan*, and *Uzbekistan* and other literature such as manuals and regulations available. Many of the huts and corners were left empty. Second, the “librarians” (or hut-managers) did not earn sufficient wages to support their families. The educators in Kyrgyzstan were not alone in struggling with financial problems. In the context of antireligious education in Russia, Glennys Young has pointed out that the lack of

³⁹ “Report of the Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee,” October, 18, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

financial support and resources, such as paper, were serious obstacles to the effective implementation of education policies.⁴⁰ Third, seasonal agricultural work, especially in the late summer and early autumn, kept families in the fields rather than the huts.

Last but not least, several Red Choikhonas had to be shut down because of their “petty bourgeois activities.” Club managers were then faced with the lack of sufficient resources and qualified personnel to confront illiteracy and “petty bourgeois activity,” such as acting as clan leaders (manaps and bais) or shepherding large tribal flocks. Female and male club and Komsomol members were expected to join the hunt for the manaps and bais, which continued into the late 1920s.

In Osh, the Komsomol members helped the Pasture Councils in revolutionary work. The councils recruited two Komsomol members, who will stay at the pasture until September first. Furthermore, five Komsomol members were assigned to the each council. The Komsomol members organize conversations every week in the clubs. They read newspapers aloud and provide knowledge and information to the Red Yurt members.⁴¹

Komsomol members fought to establish class consciousness at the pasture. At Padysha-Ata, they made the decision to move the manaps and bais from the best pastures to other areas. At Sokukurgan, at the council’s request, the Komsomol members sent to court a manap, who did not pay wages due to a peasant. The court sentenced him to pay 836 rubles to the peasant. The population was said to have related compassionately to such undertakings of the Komsomol members.⁴²

⁴⁰ Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia*, 17-18 and 138-140. Also, for Soviet education activities, see Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State*; and Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*.

⁴¹ “A Report on the work of the Osh Komsomol members on in the Red Yurts,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, August 19, 1929, p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Club managers needed to understand ail populations' sentiments regarding revolutionary activities in the cultural sphere. First, the sacred markers of Kyrgyz "tradition" challenged clubs in their efforts to introduce cultural revolution. Most rural Kyrgyz defined (and some still do) their native culture in terms of their ancestral connections to their homeland. The mountains that cover most of the territory of the modern Kyrgyz Republic were sacred to them, as were the horse, *kymyz*, *komuz*, and, of course, the *bozüi*.⁴³ Kyrgyz revere their mountains so highly that they named their first Kyrgyz language national newspaper *Erkin-Too* (first published in 1924) and their leading literary journal *Ala-Too* (first published in 1931) after their mountains. They chose to depict their mountain ranges on their handicrafts, Soviet and post-Soviet monuments, flags, medals, and other national markers of honor. Kyrgyz songs and epics demonstrate that their horses, *kymyz*, *komuz* and *bozüi* are organically and spiritually connected to the mountains.

Another manifestation of Kyrgyz connectedness to their ethnic roots was most obvious in the *bozüi*. Decorative designs on felt adorned the interiors and exteriors of the *bozüi*. Kyrgyz considered this art form as one of the original national artistic markers of their culture. During national celebrations, the *bozüi* was the focal point. The most admired national opera *Aichürök* (first performed in 1939) filled the stage of the Kyrgyz national Opera and Ballet with a number of *bozüi*.⁴⁴ The *bozüi* represented shelter

⁴³ See the Glossary for the descriptions. The Kyrgyz Republic honored the *bozüi*, placing the *tündük* (the top opening of it) on the national flag of the independent post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

⁴⁴ *Aichürök*, music: V. Vlasov, A. Maldybaev and V. Fereniki, libretto: J. Turusbekov, J. Bökönbaev and K. Malikovduku. For details see Oruzbayeva, *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*, 407. See scenes from *Aichürök* (Figure 18) on page 147.

(warmth in the winter; shade in the summer), home, and family unity.⁴⁵ Daily family rituals such as distinct decoration of men's and women's sections, and special celebrations such as the bride's section, signified that *bozüi* provided the family and the community with a cultural anchor. During my visits to Kyrgyz homes, I was surprised to find out that modern living rooms reflected the *bozüi* layout: just as in a *bozüi*, valuable bedding, quilts and textiles were stacked neatly and colorfully along the wall facing the entrance. As a guest, I was always invited to sit in front of this comfortingly soft and warm pile, called *ontör* or seat of honor, also facing the door.⁴⁶ But most importantly, *bozüi* meant mobility throughout the year, an essential feature of a nomadic society.

Second, familial and gender relations based on a nomadic past confronted the club reformers. Even today, when Kyrgyz people tell the story of pre-revolutionary times, they talk about how Kyrgyz girls and women took pride in how swiftly they took apart and put back together their dome-shaped *bozüi*.⁴⁷ They also lament the pre-revolutionary times when both girls and boys freely rode their horses on the *archa* or juniper covered hills. To Kyrgyz, the horse represented freedom, mobility, food, medicine (*kymyz* was used regularly as medicine), mythical heroism (as in *Manas*), but most importantly gender equality. They revered their gender relations as unique among Central Asian Muslims.

⁴⁵ Maksimov, *Kyrgyz Oimolory*, 52-60.

⁴⁶ When I insisted that the grandfather of the family should take this most honored place, my hosts' young son whispered in my ear that guests cannot be seated with their back to the door. It would be a sign of disrespect. Papan, Kyrgyzstan, August 12, 1995.

⁴⁷ My main sources for these are my interviews with Kyrgyz elderly in 1995 and 2002, but similar approaches to these conclusions may be found in Baltabaeva, *Kyrgyzdyn eldik kenchi*; Fiel'strup, *Iz obriadovoi zhizni kirgizov nachala XX veka*; Umatov, *Kyial düinösündö*; and Erdem, *Kyrgyz Türkleri*.

Clubs, housed in a sedentary environment, had the laborious task of teaching this nomadic people that their old ways were wrong and outdated. Club administrators needed to learn to differentiate such issues of national pride in order to assert cultural change. The revolutionary themes that were played out in clubs made these markers of national heritage targets of change, for they represented the “backwards” nomad. Club administrators pointed to planned construction projects that would replace the *bozūi* with concrete apartment blocks. They promised that the revolution would soon replace their horses with tractors and their *komuz* with violins. Ironically, replacement of one indigenous product took hold as soon as the outsiders arrived: to the detriment of all populations, revolutionaries helped replace *kymyz* (the national drink with negligible alcohol content) with high-proof vodka.⁴⁸ Like the introduction of vodka by Soviet government stores, most cultural changes came with a price.

Third, clubs administrators made “Asianness” one of their primary targets to “transform.” They considered Kyrgyz cultural habits and traditions such as *kalyng* (bride-price) and *kyz ala kachuu* (bride-stealing) “Asiatic” or “oriental,” and therefore patriarchal. They repeatedly attacked age-old Kyrgyz traditions that they deemed patriarchal or “feudal.” Regional administrators sent reports to all clubs that attacked everyday traditions which the Kyrgyz embraced. Regional leaders’ insistence on eradicating these traditions meant that they realized nomadic, pre-Islamic, and pre-Soviet traditions died hard. The most important traditions like circumcision, marriage, and

⁴⁸ I base this on my interviews with elderly Kyrgyz men and women, my fellow graduate student Elmira Kochumkulyzy, and the lectures of Professor Ilse Cirtautas and my own experiences during my trips to Kyrgyzstan in 1995 and 2002.

funeral rites persisted in somewhat changed forms in various degrees of intensity in Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, in addition to nomadism and “Asianness,” the administrators’ battle with Kyrgyz culture had other “fronts:” Islam, Turkic community characteristics, and pre-Islamic traditions. Sunni Islam reached Kyrgyz nomads from the west sometime in the ninth century, but most scholars believe that this dispersed population converted to Islam gradually and at different times.⁴⁹ Kyrgyz, who were settled and closer to Uzbek and Tajik territories, were exposed to Islam much earlier than the northern populations.⁵⁰ Among nomadic Kyrgyz, it was Sufi dervishes and Muslim traders who helped spread Islam. Scholars estimate that almost all Kyrgyz in Turkestan had converted to Islam by the end of the eighteenth century. More importantly, evidence points to their adherence to many of their pre-Islamic habits and beliefs suggesting that Kyrgyz practiced their own version of Islam.⁵¹ On the one hand, they maintained many of their tribal traditions, dealing with marriage, divorce, dispute resolution, inheritance, and funeral rites. On the other hand, they accepted various westernized ceremonies such as modernized engagement, wedding ceremonies, and attire.

Club administrators, especially non-Kyrgyz ones, referred to Kyrgyz as nominal Muslims. They pointed to the fact that Kyrgyz practiced a type of Islam that allowed pre-

⁴⁹ In the eighth century, Arab troops reached Fergana Valley, and defeated Tang Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713-755) in Talas in 751. Muslim influence took hold and began to spread among sedentary populations in the region. Fairbank, *China*, 82.

⁵⁰ Atkin, “Religious, National, and Other Identities in Central Asia,” 46-72.

⁵¹ For introduction of Islam in Turkestan see Bartol’ d *Cultural History of the Muslims*; Doronbekova, *Kyrgyzdyn jana Kyrgyzstandyn taryhy*; Skrine and Ross, *The Heart of Asia*; Karaev, *Istoriia karakhanidskogo kaganata*; Khasanov, *Narodnye dvizheniia v Kirgizii v period Kokandskogo khanstva*; Masson, *Srednyaya Azia i drevnii vostok*; Carrère d’Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire*; Hayit, *Türkistan Milli Mücadele Tarihi*; and Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş*.

Islamic habits and rituals to be components of their belief system.⁵² As in the various regions of Siberia, club leaders preached against Kyrgyz traditions that may have been based on polytheistic religions.⁵³ Club documents echoed ethnographers of the period and called the religious traditions of pre-Islamic Kyrgyz shamanism, “totemism,” or paganism. Anti-religious club documents constantly referred to these traditions as “superstitions” and discussed the necessity of eradicating them.⁵⁴

In fact, Kyrgyz were not “nominal Muslims,” but a people who enriched Islam with their centuries-old spiritual beliefs. Their spiritual attachment to nature complicated the revolutionary anti-religious work of the clubs. Mostly mountain dwellers, Kyrgyz were a people whose lives had been highly influenced by natural forces. Regardless of what ethnographers chose to name it, one of the most persistent religious beliefs of Kyrgyz was their deep engagement with nature. Kyrgyz reconciled their pre-Islamic reverence to sacred animals like the snow leopard, horse, camel and wild goat by acknowledging that Islam, too, commanded respect for all God’s creatures.⁵⁵ Justifying their beliefs in *Umai Ene* (Mother Umai), *Bakshy* (shaman healer), fire, water, and earth after converting to Islam was more challenging. The protector of children, *Umai Ene*, for example, enjoyed a goddess-like presence in Kyrgyz culture. Kyrgyz assigned Islamic

⁵² This tradition some scholars called “Folk Islam” exists in all Muslim countries. Clifford Geertz, for example addresses these issues in his work on North American and Southeast Asian Islamic traditions. See Geertz, *Islam Observed*. For interactions between nomadism and Islam see Asad, *The Kababish Arabs*.

⁵³ For Soviet cultural and nationalities policies in Siberia see, Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*; and for Sakhalin Island see Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture*.

⁵⁴ For similar anti-religious campaigns against Orthodox Christian populations see Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia*; Peris, *Storming the Heavens*; and Husband, ‘*Godless Communists*.’

⁵⁵ For religious traditions of nomadic peoples see, Barfield, *The Nomadic Alternative*; Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony 1581-1990*; and Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society, the Soviet Case*.

significance to such pre-Islamic god-like figures as *Umai Ene*, relying on appropriate phrases from the Koran such as: “Heaven is under the feet of mothers.”⁵⁶ The revolutionaries in clubs were dealing with a sophisticated and well-established religious belief system.

The discourse of ethnic and religious descriptions of Kyrgyz in all documents reflected the nationalities policies of the 1920s. Club administrators routinely read the official propaganda that their Kyrgyz were one of the essential pieces of a puzzle called the Soviet nation. Each nationality would have a unique and special place in the puzzle, but share a unified Soviet culture.⁵⁷ Kyrgyz, for example, would become the free-spirited nation of the mountains and Ysyk Köl, portrayed and represented by heroic writers like Aitmatov.⁵⁸ Alongside Kazakhs, they would become the symbols of women’s liberation

⁵⁶ Erdem, *Kirgiz Türkleri*, 106-18.

⁵⁷ This is what Yuri Slezkine called a “communal apartment.” See Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.”

⁵⁸ Abdyldabekov, *Chingiz Aitmatov*; Akmataliyev, *Chingiz Aitmatov*; idem, *Aitmatovgo taasirlenüü: adabii makalalar*; Aragon, “Samaia prekrasnaia na svete povest’ o liubvi;” Asadullaev, *Istorizm, teoriia i tipologiia sotsialisticheskogo realizma*; Asanaliyev, *Chynggyz Aitmatov*; Boqii and Khuzhamberdi, *Chuqqida qolgan ovchining ohi-zori: asr adoghida aitilgan istighfor*; Brown, *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature*; Clark, “The Mutability of the Canon;” idem, Foreward, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*; idem, *The Soviet Novel*; Chubinskii, “Sarozekskie metafory Chingiza Aitmatova;” Gachev, *Chingiz Aitmatov v svete mirovoi kul’tury*; Glinkin, *Chingiz Aitmatov*; Grahmn, “Chingiz Aitmatov’s Proshchay Gul’sary;” Haber, *The Myth of the Non-Russian*, Imart and Imart, “Le Procurator, L’indigene at le Billot;” “K 50-letiiu Chingiza Aitmatova;” Kerimzhanova, *Ch. Aitmatovdun alym chygarmalarynda avtor zhana kaarman problemasy*; Kolesnikoff, “The Child Narrator in the Novellas of Chingiz Aitmatov;” idem, *Myth in the Works of Chingiz Aitmatov*; Lebedeva, *Krutoe voskhozhdenie: zametki o kirgizskoi literature*; Levchenko, *Chingiz Aitmatov*; Mozur, *Parables From the Past*; Myltyqbaev, *Shyngghys Aitmatov*; Paton, “Chingiz Aitmatov’s First Novel;” Porter, “Chingiz Aitmatov;” Pavlovskii, “O romane Chingiza Aitmatova Plakha;” Peterson, *Subversive Imaginations*; Potapov, “Chet chelovechnosti;” “Obsuzhdaem roman Chingiza Aitmatova Plakha;” Ovcharenko, *Sotsialisticheskii realizm i sovremennyi literaturnyi protsess*; Pittman, “Chingiz Aytmatov’s Plakha;” Riordan, “Chingiz Aitmatov;” Rougle, “On ‘Fantastic’ Trend in recent Soviet Prose;” Sheneidman, “Soviet Literature at the Crossroads;” idem, *Russian Literature 1988-1994*; Slemon, “Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse;” “Sluzhenie narodu k 50-letiiu Ch. Aitmatova;” Sukhomlinova, *Chingiz Aitmatov*; Tumanov, “Mythic Cycles in Chingiz Aitmatov’s ‘Spotted Dog Running Along the Seashore’;” Turgunbaev, *Biz duinonu zhangyrtabvyz, duino bizdi zhangyrtat: makalalar, maekteshüülör, süilöngön sözdör*, Ukubayeva, *Chynggyz Aitmatovdun kaarmandarynyn körköm düinösü*; idem, “Kirgiz Edebiyati;” Voronov, “Gorizonty Chingiza Aitmatova;”

among the Muslim nations of Central Asia, kind and generous hosts of the deported nationalities from the Caucasus, bilingual citizens, and classless and modern kolkhozniks who tend their flocks at the farms, rather than in nomadic camps.

Regional Party reports dictated that, ideally, the institutions of education and culture would cooperate in educating these so-called “superstitious” and “backwards” nomads in order to find solutions for social and political problems. Ail administrators voiced the complaints and needs of their members, arguing that these problems would be solved only if regional committees addressed them. A report listed solutions that included instituting paid positions among the workers to serve as teachers, administrative staff and “librarians” in the reading huts; providing separate reading opportunities for all resident nationalities such as the Russians, Dungans, Germans, Tatars, Uzbeks, Uygurs and Kyrgyz; constituting an inspection process and site visits from regional and higher offices; and planning regional conferences and celebrations.⁵⁹ Political conferences and revolutionary celebrations like ail festivals provided opportunities for various nationalities and regional populations to witness each others’ work.

The report of an ail official named A. Rakhimov voiced the concerns of ail officials responding to these difficulties in bringing culture to Kyrgyz ails. Rakhimov offered a window into the life of an early Red Yurt. In his correspondence with the political education committee, Rakhimov exemplified the discontented voices of the organizers and managers of Red Yurts and clubs. The sources of these managers’

Woodward, “Chingiz Aitmatov’s Second Novel;” and Zhuravkina, “Real and Unreal Women in the Works of Chingiz Aitmatov.”

⁵⁹ “Report of the Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee,” October 18, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

discontent varied. Clubs did not only blame the authorities, but also ails' everyday living habits and customs. First, ail administrators held the authorities responsible for failing to keep their promises. Second, they noted that the way of living in the ail posed a threat for revolutionary work. In other words, they faulted precisely what the Houses of Culture, and more generally the Bolshevik project of cultural revolution sought to transform.

As an organizer of Red Yurts in Karakol and Naryn, Rakhimov appealed to the authorities for more books, more newspapers, more teachers and, most strikingly, more understanding of ail culture and more sympathy for the needs of ail populations. He wrote that ail populations were trying their best to support cultural activities. They had no money, but donated whatever amount they could. According to Rakhimov, since materials for building Red Yurts never arrived, it was necessary to collect money from volunteers. Apparently each village in Tong donated one ruble, for a total donation of fifty rubles. With the thirty rubles that Women's Club donated, the women were able to buy some red and black satin for the interior of the Red Yurts. Ultimately, having been unable to collect enough funds to build a Red Yurt, they rented other Yurts for ten days to carry out their work.

In a 1925 letter of assessment to the Political Education Committee, Rakhimov noted that poor peasants who worked on the land all day long had no energy or desire to attend the activities of Red Yurts. He reported that nomadic and animal-herding peasants, on the other hand, tended to vanish, often for days at a time. It was almost impossible for managers to gather even a small group to fill a Red Yurt. Rakhimov also

pointed out that the seasonal migrations of pastoral nomadic Kyrgyz people interfered with the goals of clubs. He specifically referred to the summer months when the families and clans moved to the mountain pastures. Rakhimov's tone was disappointed but pragmatic. Nevertheless, he was resolute: "If there was idle time, plenty of people with interest were present."⁶⁰ According to his report, in Tong Region in the month of June, six gatherings took place: only 114 women and 195 men attended these meetings. Significantly, only a small number of women attended voluntarily; the majority was rounded up from their yurts. Rakhimov's report suggests that he and other organizers "forced these women" (*zhenshchiny nasil'no*) to come to the meetings regarding hygiene and "Muslim customs such as kalyng for a bride."⁶¹

On a daily basis, indigenous ways of living confronted club administrators. They had to respond to the needs of the ails while attempting to keep up with their official responsibilities. Because of the small size of most ails, the club members were often related to the administrators. Clan and ethnic allegiances, what the official rhetoric called "tribalism," was therefore a major issue.

Ethnic Leadership

Ethnic leadership emerged as a response to one of the main obstacles to cultural revolution: tribalism or nepotism. Ail leaders used traditional connections and methods to interpret the Soviet discourse on national culture. A case in point was the persistence of clan leadership within ail institutions. The kolkhoz managers and club administrators

⁶⁰ "The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in Karakol and Naryn region, June 1 to August 1, 1925," August 12, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, ll. 16-17.

⁶¹ The type of "force" is not clear from the report.

looked to aksakals for guidance when they needed to appoint young leaders.

Especially in small ails, the power structures ran far and deep. The newcomers, such as the Bolshevik administrators from the oblasts, needed to rely on aksakals because written documentation of human resources did not exist. Several scholars have shown that because of this, traditional social organizations and Soviet institutions overlapped with each other.⁶² Tajik and Uzbek kolkhoz structures reflected the familial relations, while Kazakh party nomenclature took control of their ail administrations. In Kyrgyzstan, too, relatives relied on each other for club positions and kolkhoz jobs. There was reported violence when relatives refused to help their own.⁶³

The participants in the Houses of Culture played an important role in keeping the activities “Kyrgyz” or “Uzbek” while adhering to Soviet requirements. By the 1930s, Stalin’s Soviet Kyrgyzstan turned out to be a cultural landscape that alternated between paying tribute to and suppressing ethnic cultures. The paradoxical policies of *slianiie* or coming together of cultures, and *korenizatsiia* or “nativization,” promotion of using ail people in the organs of government, coexisted in this landscape.⁶⁴ At the height of the Stalinism, producers of Soviet culture such as club managers learned to highlight ethnic and national differences. On the part of club managers, this was a pragmatic solution to a rapidly changing state policy. This behavior demonstrated that the managers wanted to show that nationalities policies succeeded in elevating ethnic communities to the position of legitimate nationalities. The official discourse on *natsional’nost* engendered self-

⁶² Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian Rule*; Olcott, *The Kazakhs*; Snesev, “On Some Causes of the Persistence of Religio-Customary Survivals among the Khorezm Uzbeks.”

⁶³ Hvoslef, “Tribalism and Kirgizia,” 96-108.

⁶⁴ Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 398-418. For “nativization,” see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

perpetuating ethnicities that were isolated from each other and from economic forces in the society.⁶⁵

Regional and Ail Administrators Respond

Both urban and ail club administrators routinely responded to the human resource requirements of the regional committees. Nominating volunteers to work was one thing, putting them to work was another. Administrators often conveyed the deficiencies, needs, complaints, and desires of their constituencies.⁶⁶

The Central Committee of the Party in Moscow was impatient, demanding that the political education of ail populations continue regardless of an ail's economic conditions. The commissars in top administrative positions provided very little practical guidance to the regional leadership on how to finance the political and cultural education of their populations. On February 11, 1923, the Party sent out a statement to the regional committees about clubs, requesting them to concentrate on the political education of their members. The statement requested that every communist become an active member of a club. It also demanded that communists who were particularly well-organized take leadership positions in active clubs. The document also ordered clubs to report to the center the activities of non-partisans, an indication that one did not need to be a Party member to participate in club activities.⁶⁷ The same document listed an array of offices that must finance and manage the clubs. The Central Committee of the Party in Russia

⁶⁵ For an engaging and informative discussion on the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, see Skalnik, "Soviet Etnografiia and the National(ities) Question," 183-92.

⁶⁶ "The Statement of the Central Committee of Russian Communist Party to all Regional Committees of the Party on the Transformation of Clubs into the Centers of Party and Political Education Work," February 11, 1923, TsGARK of the Alma-Ata Region, f. 337, op. 1, d. 271, l. 75.

⁶⁷ For membership in clubs in Russia see Gorzka, "Proletarian Culture in Practice: Workers' Clubs, 1917-1921," 29-55; and Hatch, "Hangouts and Hangovers," 97-117.

expected every oblast to use its own resources to manage and finance the clubs.⁶⁸

The Party did not make clear or give specific instructions on the ways in which it expected the oblasts or the clubs to organize all these processes.

The districts took it upon themselves to select people and resources that they could obtain without much money. On May 20, 1923, Pishpek District Narkompros reported that a political education committee was being organized. The department assigned a Chairperson of Political Education who would make “the liquidation of illiteracy” his first mission.

The Pishpek Narkompros also reported that the district had a building with its own stage, which would house club activities for the worker’s unions. Most interestingly, it reported the opening of a “house for peasants” especially reserved for Kyrgyz coming down from the steppe and the mountains. This two-story house had a courtyard where Kyrgyz travelers could tie their horses, but the report noted that the house needed more literature and an information desk. According to the report, the house already had 128 Russian and 2136 “Muslim” books which, so far, had been used to educate the illiterate in the ail prison. In addition, twenty-four Muslim youths and thirty older illiterate persons were currently receiving pre-conscription military training with the help of three schools of the area.⁶⁹ The district let regional administrators know that they were trying their best with very little regional support.

⁶⁸ “The Statement of the Central Committee of Russian Communist Party to all Regional Committees of the Party on the Transformation of Clubs into the Centers of Party and Political Education Work,” February 11, 1923, State Archive of the Alma-Ata Region, f. 337, op. 1, d. 271, l. 75.

⁶⁹ “The Report of Pishpek District, Department of National Education on Political Education Work in the District,” May 20, 1923, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 268, l. 51.

One of the main problems of establishing “proletarian class education” among Kyrgyz families was the lack of actual and political literacy. This problem is addressed in a report referred to two specific Choikhonas in Tokmok. According to this report, other organizations like the Komsomol and pioneers took some of the responsibilities of “stamping out” petty bourgeois activity and illiteracy.⁷⁰ This report, like many others mentioned that “communication between ail Komsomol and the reading huts was satisfactory.” Most reports coming from the district administrators made a point of showing collaboration between various ail branches of the Party, such as the Komsomol, pioneers, reading huts and worker’s corners.

On May 21, 1924, the “District-Urban” Committee of the Turkestan Communist Party wrote that in Pishpek the field of political education remained weak in every respect. Following an extended session, the Committee complained that educational work in this area lacked appropriate management to carry out “agitation” work, advanced staff to handle party organization, and a budget to support these activities on every level. The report also complained that the “cultural level” of the party members in both the nomadic encampments and sedentarized villages was very low. It was therefore difficult for the administrators to separate party members from non-members. The report explained “in our organization, the percentage of uneducated persons is a great monstrosity” and the liquidation of illiteracy had not even begun. According to the report, the agitation and propaganda committee’s work seemed to be non-existent.⁷¹

⁷⁰ “Report of the Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee,” October, 18, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

⁷¹ “The Resolution of Second Session of Pishpek District-Urban Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan on the Cultural-Educational Work,” May 21, 1924, TsKPSS, f. 2, op. 1, d. 204, ll. 6-7.

This self-disparaging communiqué reflects the great disappointment of ail administrators. It had been a year since the guidelines had been given out to the regional committees and improvements were hard to come by. This report also makes a striking distinction among the populations in the region --it sets the "non-members of the party" apart, labeling them "poor peasants." It points to this population as the target for education while admitting that even the party members were not well-educated or "cultured." The regional administrators realized that it was still difficult to distinguish a party member from a non-member, not to mention to distinguish a peasant from a non-peasant. The recognition of the proletariat, therefore, must have been an alien task for all involved.

Nevertheless, ail administrators did not give up. They attempted to assert their own ideas. To take on the task of raising the general level of political literacy among non-Party masses the "District-Urban" Committee of the Turkestan Communist Party issued several orders. First, said the Committee, Leninist ideals should be taught to the largest possible population. Second, agitation and propaganda work should become a priority of the political education committees in every region: The committees were to organize societies that advocate and impose an anti-illiteracy campaign, called "Down with Illiteracy," and they needed to pay special attention to the poor peasants.⁷² Third, Women's Departments were to be directly involved in agitation and propaganda work; they were expected to place the manager of their department on the board of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee; and at least twenty-five percent of poor women were to be recruited to carry out such work. Finally, "a preparatory department" of

⁷² See, Clark, *Uprooting Otherness: The Literacy Campaign in NEP-era Russia*.

national minorities was needed for future work among the minorities of the region.⁷³

In this way, the ail leadership would be able to identify the people in terms of their social status.

For a long time, ethnic and tribal allegiances had defined everyday living habits and relations among Kyrgyz. Now, club administrators hoped that people would identify themselves as peasants, workers, literate people, students, party members and agitators. These newly-introduced revolutionary versions of community confronted age-old indigenous communities such as those based on tribes and clans. Soviet administrators realized that they needed to attack these indigenous allegiances if they were to introduce new Soviet communities. Their targets changed over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. In the late 1920s, regional leaders focused on the most immediate community issues in ails related to dwelling habits and traditions. Their main concern was moving Kyrgyz to settled villages and providing communal places such as clubs for them to gather.⁷⁴ Club administrators' major concerns were practical, such as arranging a room for the tea drinking rituals of Uzbek men. The administrators needed to recognize how best to approach ethnically different populations. Administrative reports indicate that club administrators learned, for example, that an Uzbek farmer would pay more attention to a political speech in a teahouse rather than in a bozüi. In the 1930s, administrators shifted their focus to the more threatening issue of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism among

⁷³ "The Resolution of Second Session of Pishpek District-Urban Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan on the Cultural-Educational Work," May 21, 1924, TsKPSS, f. 2, op. 1, d. 204, ll. 6-7.

⁷⁴ "The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in Karakol and Naryn region, June 1 to August 1, 1925," August 12, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, ll. 16-17.

Kyrgyz.⁷⁵ This shift in targets reflected the Party's changing focus regarding the nationalities policies.⁷⁶ Kyrgyz cadres such as club administrators needed to reevaluate their own strategies in regards to the Party's shifting targets.

A First Step Towards Cultural Revolution: Reading Rooms

The regional administrators demanded that ail club leaders get to know their populations (Uzbek, Kyrgyz, or other) to attract new members to the clubs and recruits to do the Party's revolutionary work. The regional party committees began the agitation and propaganda work that the Pishpek District-Urban Committee had outlined. In a letter full of directives, for example, the Jeti Suu Region's party officials ordered ail organizers to focus on more "vigorous" and "locally conscious" work. This letter announced that the promotion of cultural education in poor farming and animal-herding communities was the "most important activity from the point of view of the victory of communism."⁷⁷ The communist party in Turkestan, following the orders of the central party in Russia, concluded that "the agitation work had to begin from the bottom layers of Kyrgyz society." This meant attracting poorer Kyrgyz to "revolutionary work."

After the committees in each region evaluated the existing physical facilities and capabilities of the ails, they decided that "reading rooms" would be the first logical and realistic step. In ethnically mixed areas, reading rooms would provide a space for the adult ail population to learn to read and participate in various reading and theater circles. Paradoxically, these barren rooms, neutral and devoid of any ethnic significance, were

⁷⁵ *Kolkhoznaia Pravda*, 22 January 1938, 2.

⁷⁶ On the changing focus of the party see Tillett, *The Great Friendship*.

⁷⁷ "The Resolution of Second Session of Pishpek District-Urban Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan on the Cultural-Educational Work," May 21, 1924, TsKPSS, f. 2, op. 1, d. 204, ll. 6-7.

expected to create an inclusive and friendly atmosphere among various nationalities.

A 1930 communiqué highlighted the reading activities, reporting that the “cultural brigade team of Kirilin, Berkovsy, Besedina, and Simonenko began their inspection of cultural activities in the silk-winding factory and found that there is a library at the club, which conducted readings of *Pravda*, *Pravda Vostoka*, and *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* newspapers.”⁷⁸

Public reading emerged as one of the most common cultural activities in clubs because they required little in terms of funding or manpower. “Lenin corners” within clubs often hosted such readings. Volunteers enjoyed reading the news, articles, commentaries, and poetry from Soviet newspapers in front of crowds; some had the reputation of being good orators while others wanted to show off their newly acquired reading skills. Skepticism existed among some club members, however. Volunteer readers received the brunt of such cynicism. This popular joke reflects such a sentiment:

A volunteer at a Kyrgyz club meeting read out loud to the crowd about the successes of the first *Piatiletka*.⁷⁹

“The comrades have built a hydroelectric station in Sulyukta.”⁸⁰

A voice from the audience contradicted the volunteer:

“I just came from Sulyukta. I did not see anything like a hydroelectric station.”

The volunteer ignored the comment and continued:

“The comrades have built a chemical factory in Przheval’sk.”⁸¹

The same voice yelled:

“I came from Przheval’sk two days ago. There was no such a thing as a chemical factory there.”

The volunteer lost his temper this time, and responded to the voice in the audience:

⁷⁸ “The Report of the brigade inspection of the Osh Silk Factory,” May 26, 1930, TsGAKSSR, f. 60, op. 2 d. 215, l. 472.

⁷⁹ *Piatiletka* means Five-year Plan in Russian.

⁸⁰ Sulyukta is located on the southwestern border with Tajikistan.

⁸¹ Przheval’sk (Karakol) is located near the northeastern border with Kazakhstan.

“Comrade, why don’t you stop traveling aimlessly from one end of the country to the other and start listening to the newspaper?”⁸²

In remote regions where Red Yurts and Red Choikhonas were not yet opened, district administrators started smaller gathering places called “reading huts” and “Leninist corners.” The Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee reported on October 18, 1925 that eight rural districts carried out political education work.⁸³ This important work took place in reading huts. The oblast administration sent out political education literature to all the rural districts for distribution. Thirty-one reading huts and eleven Lenin Corners received and began using this literature under the tutelage of all teachers and Komsomol members. Many such reports argued that the most important service these huts and corners provided was the “reading-aloud” of newspapers to the illiterates. This type of service, according to official reports like this one, was a good example of combining cultural and political education. Illiterate listeners heard about cultural activities taking place in Pishpek, Almaty or Moscow while taking in a dose of Bolshevik propaganda.

In the meantime, however, Kyrgyz maintained a healthy amount of skepticism about state control of information and propaganda. They did this with a sense of humor. One of the popular jokes refers to such attitude:

A kolkhoz club manager asks a club member:
“Comrade Nazarov, do you read our wall newspapers often?”
Nazarov responds:

⁸² I heard this joke from Aibek Sultanov in April 1995. Aibek pointed out that government propaganda is timeless and universal. He suggested that his grandparents, parents and his own post-Soviet peers feel the same way. He asked: “Isn’t Turkish or American nationalist and capitalist propaganda the same?”

⁸³ “Report of the Pishpek Regional Political Education Committee,” October, 18, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

“Of course, I do. How else would I learn that we have a wonderful life here in the ail?”⁸⁴

The managers of ail and district clubs arranged the reading rooms and activities.

Ail reports indicate that although the establishment of these rooms came from the regional offices, district and ail managers took the initiative to institute these more modest education goals in their clubs. Club members, on the other hand, learned to take what they could from such activities as public reading, and joked about the heavy-handed propaganda that was part of all educational activity.

In addition, the reading rooms would post wall newspapers in Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages to spark the curiosity of the adults and children who visited them, encouraging the people to learn to read. Jeti Suu Committee’s letter requested that Red *Choikhonas* must be established where appropriate in place of the reading rooms.⁸⁵ This indicates that the Committees had begun to understand the gathering traditions of ail populations; that Uzbek men preferred their *Choikhonas*, while Kyrgyz men did not mix with Uzbeks in the traditional gathering places of sedentary societies.⁸⁶

In their correspondence, club managers stressed that they needed more attention from regional offices in order to combine education with entertainment. Their correspondence points to two main problems. First, clubs complained about the lack of reading and educational materials in nearly every report and letter sent to the regional and central authorities. They also referred to the incompatibility of some of the reading

⁸⁴ I heard this joke from K. D. Kadyrkulov in June 2002. He argued that this is how his parents and their friends managed to deal with “overwhelming propaganda.”

⁸⁵ “The Circular Letter of Jeti Suu Regional Communist Party of Turkestan to the District Committees of the Party about the organization of cultural education work in the villages,” October 8, 1924, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 70, l. 13.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

materials: in many cases Kyrgyz clubs received Uzbek or Kazakh language books.⁸⁷

Their complaints regarding the types of reading materials demonstrated the grievances between the ethnic groups. Sooner or later, administrators would have to address these issues.

Second, club administrators were constantly frustrated by the empty promises of regional offices. Books did not arrive, or when they came, they were not in the Kyrgyz language. Often, club members complained to managers that the books were not interesting for Kyrgyz readers. Administrators begged for literature that addressed the interests and concerns of all populations.⁸⁸ They grumbled that they could not educate constituencies with materials that were alien to them, both in language and content.

Both the ambiguous policy regarding national languages and the existence of a multiplicity of languages in the region made the clubs' jobs difficult. The regional offices had not learned to handle the language issue in 1925. A report of Kara Kol District's educational committee asserted that the committee was on the right path in regards to the political education of Kyrgyz nomads. Nevertheless, they expressed their frustration, noting that there was a serious "lack of Kyrgyz language literature." They also protested that 200 issues of Kara Kyrgyz language literature, promised to them by the regional political education committee, never arrived. According to Rakhimov, "There are no books in Kyrgyz language except the ones about politics and economics. The population does not need such books." He begrudgingly pointed out that all the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

interesting reading materials such as poems are “in Kazakh language, which one understands a little.”⁸⁹

In addition to their complaints about unfulfilled promises, ail administrators commented on the content of the articles in regional papers. An author of a report from Karakol district remarked explicitly on the contents of the *Erkin Too* newspaper. The “legendary stories of Kara Kyrgyz people,” retold in *Erkin Too*, failed to spark any genuine interest among the people. He argued that club managers wanted to see articles that expanded the horizons of ail populations. He also argued that club members wanted to read about other Soviet heroes and see them on the screen in club cinemas. Appealing to higher authorities, the Karakol committee member expressed his disappointment about insufficient funds for showing films in their clubs.⁹⁰ He concluded that if club managers were to teach their populations about socialism and the cultural superiority of the Soviet Union, they needed books and films that highlighted these themes.

The ail leadership always wanted to demonstrate that they were doing their job correctly and working hard despite all the odds, so that they could demand more resources (both material and human) from the top levels of the regional Party. Workers’ unions in various industries began sending their reports to the center in Pishpek. They wanted to demonstrate that the people of their regions took part in the work of cultural education. In a letter from the Kara Kol district, the union of the forestry workers reported that the union deducted a percentage from their salaries to support cultural work in their region that amounted to 89 rubles and 86 kopecks. The money supported a club

⁸⁹ “The Report of Kara Kol District, Political Education Committee on the activities of political education,” March 15, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 35, l. 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

in the Ysyk Kōl State Horse Factory that had 19 members. It included a reading room that welcomed visitors from other parts of the country at talks. The chairman of the Kara Kol Union of Forestry Workers, V. Slantekov, noted that the reading rooms also hosted musical, theatrical, and literary performances.⁹¹

How to Entertain and Educate at the Same Time

Ideally, clubs would carry out their educational work with the aid of the performing arts. For Kyrgyz the traditional and principal art form was the recitation of the eternal national epic, *Manas*.⁹² But *Manas* was more than just art for Kyrgyz. They considered *Manas* to be their strongest connection to their past and the primary guide for correct social and cultural behavior.⁹³ Containing over half a million lines and sixty-five known oral variations (yet to be completely written down), this national epic is a trilogy, each part is named after its hero: the first part, *Manas*, recites the life and times of the hero; the second part, *Semetei*, is about *Manas's* son; and the last part, *Seitek*, tells the story of *Manas's* grandson. *Manas* emerged as a leader against the Uygur enemies in the eighth century AD. He became the leader of the Kyrgyz against the Kara-Kitai between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD. The epic renders the historical events between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries AD. to reflect the mythical past. The consensus among

⁹¹ "The Report of Kara Kol District Union of the Forestry Workers on Cultural Work among the Members of the Union," October 25, 1924, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 55, l. 28.

⁹² See T. Gertsen's lithograph of *Manas* (Figure 19) on page 148.

⁹³ For information on Kyrgyz ancestral narratives see Musayev, *Epos Manas*; Kebekova, "Kurmanbek" *eposunun variantтары*; Nurunbetov, et al., *Babalardyn Osuyatynan Memlekettik Ideologyaya*; Kydyrbaeva, et al., *Varianty eposa "Manas"*; Lipkina, et al., *Manas: Kirgizskii epos. Velikii pokhod*; Sadykov, et al., *Manas: Kirgizskii geroicheskii epos*; Berkov and Sadigova, *Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' literatury o "Manase"*; Karypkulov, et al., *Chui Oblusu (Chuiskaia Oblast) Entsiklopediya*; Valikhanov, in Margulan, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*; Bogdanova, et al., *Kirgizskii geroicheskii epos "Manas"*; Benningesen, "The crisis of the Turkic national epics, 1951-1952: Local nationalism or internationalism?"; and Prior, *Patron, Party, Partimony: Notes on the Cultural History of the Kyrgyz Epic Tradition*.

the scholars of the epic concludes that *Manas* tells the story of unification among Kyrgyz tribes and the establishment of the first Kyrgyz state. *Manas* has always been significant for the Kyrgyz people because it has been seen as the depository of Kyrgyz history, culture, ancient foreign relations, and perhaps most importantly the main code of ethical conduct in society.

Clans and kinship ties have a significant place in the Kyrgyz national psyche, because *Manas* was one of the main sources of entertainment for nomadic Kyrgyz. These important bonds are often the subject matter of *Manas*. As a source of entertainment, *manaschy* (traveling bards who perform) recited the epic for tribes, who sat in a circle as one family and listened to this educational and entertaining story of their ancestors. Just as typical nomads not believe in not owning land and material goods, typical Kyrgyz believed in the *Manas* epic, as their “real” history. This epic strengthened their connections to the more immaterial and spiritual, such as familial and clan ties.⁹⁴

Regional club administration first needed to assess the education value of *Manas*, which entertained all age-groups of Kyrgyz: could it become an educational tool while still entertaining the population? Regional reports expressed ambivalence about the epic, but later, especially in the 1950s, attacked it for being pan-Islamic, tribalist, and feudal. In the 1920s, regional club administrators were unsure about how to treat this epic because very few non-Kyrgyz cadres understood its content and its significance for

94 During the post-Soviet era of the 1990s, the newly independent Kyrgyz government relied on this sentimental connection of the people to *Manas* and evoked the epic as the primary marker of revived national community in the new Kyrgyz Republic. This was a stark contrast to the Soviet administration's treatment of this epic. The best example of this is the official web page of the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the USA and Canada. It highlights *Manas* as the primary symbol of Kyrgyzness. The cover page welcomes the visitor with a cover of the current President Askar Akaev's (1991-) book entitled, *Kyrgyz Statehood and the National Epos "Manas."* See <http://www.kyrgyzstan.org/>.

Kyrgyz. Furthermore, it was an oral epic that individual manaschys improvised in accordance with the political climate. Gradually, the epic as a moral code of behavior began to threaten club managers more than its pan-Islamic or tribalist nature. In general, Soviet authorities found it troublesome that Kyrgyz maintained this legendary hero's moral code as their guide.

Clubs were expected to put on "spectacles" that dramatized class struggles rather than historical triumphs, so playwrights managed to pull such stories out of the epic. Administrators demanded that all populations should be entertained with new plays and stories in place of this old and redundant genre. If they were to continue using the epic, club administrators in ails were constantly told to emphasize the entertainment and educational value of the epic rather than its moral, social and cultural meanings. S. Musayev, a scholar of *Manas*, has written that "until the Great October Socialist Revolution the only manifestation of ideals, the wisdom depository of working people was its folklore."⁹⁵ Musayev referred to *Manas* as the central piece of this folklore which emphasized the struggle of Kyrgyz people against their internal and external oppressors.

Correspondence of ail leaders sheds light on what types of entertainment worked and what did not. In the following documents, ail leaders wrote about the responses and preferences of the members of their clubs and the audiences of their spectacles. They wrote that "in their spare time, the workers and the other employees met at the club. They read, talked on current topics, and exchanged ideas. The most important type of entertainment and cultural education, however, is the theater." This is how the

⁹⁵ Musayev, *Epos Manas*, 13.

administrator of the school portrayed one evening of cultural activity at the Ysyk Köl State Horse Factory in 1924.⁹⁶ The administrator, V. Melnichuk, noted that the workers formed “an amateur drama circle” in the factory. The actors were enthusiastic and active. The most recent play the workers put on stage was titled “Spring without Sun.”⁹⁷ Sometimes, such correspondence seemed routine, at other times enthusiastic. Some reports went into fine detail, others reported sheer statistics. They all, however, emphasized the importance of educating the public while entertaining them.

Kyrgyzzness Evolves into Something New in the 1930s

Clubs had one more revolutionary duty: to discredit most oral histories as nonsense, and introduce “scientific histories” written by professional historians.⁹⁸ Club administrators needed to grapple with oral histories that were passed down to younger generations. It was quite an undertaking to reshape traditional mythologies and impose new interpretations of Kyrgyz past. In addition to schools, clubs were expected to shoulder the responsibility of rewriting Central Asian and Kyrgyz history.

The Soviet version of “ethnic histories” created a complex puzzle. Nationalities commissariats tried to tap into the ethnic and national pride of non-Russians in Central Asia by attempting to prove to them that the state valued their unique contributions to the country’s culture. But, at the same time, the commissariats manipulated the ethnic narratives and traditions in order to downplay what they saw as potentially anti-Soviet elements.

⁹⁶ “The Report of the Administrator of the School at the Ysyk Köl State Horse Factory on the Cultural Work,” December 9, 1924, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 76, l. 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ For the memorialization of October 1917, see Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*.

A different type of cultural revolution was taking place in the 1930s. After a decade of ideological education in clubs and other cultural institutions, Kyrgyz cadres began to move into positions of power. For example, the names of the managers in club documents of the 1930s indicate that larger numbers of Kyrgyz were taking leadership positions. A bureaucracy of Kyrgyz administrators were emerging, making Kyrgyz part of this continuously enlarging Soviet state. The ascendance of national cadres and the persecution of “bourgeois specialists” went hand-in-hand in the 1930s.⁹⁹ Clubs, as one of the institutions to carry out this new Cultural Revolution, were responsible in recognizing “worthy” cadres and weeding out the enemies of the system.

One of the primary concerns of club administrators who worked with nationalities issues was to be able to identify what made Kyrgyz people Kyrgyz. The conventional view of their past separated Kyrgyz from the other Central Asians. Their nomadic community seemed to define a discrete space for them surrounded by the sedentary Central Asians whom they often derogatorily called *sart*.¹⁰⁰ Kyrgyz sometimes saw nomadic community as something to be proud of, as remarkable or nostalgic; at other times they saw it as inferior, isolated, or estranged from the large sedentary populations. The manifestations of this multi-faceted community appeared in the ways in which Kyrgyz narrated their history.

Self-identification among all populations had always been intricate, but was often tied to official histories that Kyrgyz were a unique people among other Central Asians.

⁹⁹ For descriptions of the Cultural Revolution of the 1930s, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism*.

¹⁰⁰ This term that often marked Uzbek populations of southern Kyrgyzstan, created a host of problems that this dissertation will not address. The popular view in Kyrgyzstan suggests, however disparagingly, that literary meaning of the word *sart* is “yellow dog” (*sari it*), referring to a sedentary and lazy creature that willingly pleases its masters.

In other words, as nomads, when faced with outsiders, Kyrgyz identified themselves and their history as distinct from that of their neighbors, such as Tajiks or Uzbeks. For an outside observer, it was difficult to differentiate official histories from Kyrgyz oral narrative. Nevertheless, in the 1930s, the emphasis on “Kyrgyzness” as a separate and distinct community among Turkic Central Asians suited the Soviet nationalities policy: a number of scholars of the Soviet Union have asserted that as the Soviet Union matured as a multinational entity, the state policy supported the development of distinct national communities.¹⁰¹

Beginning in the 1930s, Kyrgyz elites and leaders enjoyed such state support for a national narrative, which they suggested was based on the Kyrgyz past. The tradition of oral history recitation by aksakals established an enduring narrative of the Kyrgyz past. The contribution of the manaschys and akyns enhanced this narrative. In clubs, akyns held the center stage: Toktogul (1864-1933), the most esteemed akyn, played a significant role in defining “Kyrgyzness” with his songs. Akyns sang Toktogul’s lyrics and melodies in clubs all over the country. In his songs, Toktogul satirized Kyrgyz who bowed to the imperial Russian power, and suggested that they regained their national community under the “free Soviet society.”¹⁰² Even after his death, Toktogul remained one of the most revered akyns, both by the state and the people.

The meaning of Kyrgyzness during the 1930s was unstable. Being Kyrgyz was tied to ancient roots. But according to those whose formative years began during the

¹⁰¹ For example, Slezkine, “Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism,” Suny and Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*; and Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

¹⁰² Toktogul, “Lenin Jöntündö Yr,” 13-23.

early Soviet period, it was Soviet socialism, a specific incarnation of Cultural Revolution and development, that helped Kyrgyz unearth these roots to fashion a Soviet Kyrgyz community.¹⁰³ Clubs, along with schools and other educational institutions constructed the official revival of Kyrgyz past. Clubs were responsible for educating adults about their “forgotten past.” In the 1930s, they selectively asserted the official history by using traditional songs and epics. This history was passed down and remained almost stagnant until this day. Time and again, when I met a Kyrgyz aksakal, his first question upon finding out that I was a Turk would sound something like this: “Do you know whether Turks or Kyrgyz people appear first in history?” I would answer: “Scholars of ancient Central Asia suggest that the old Chinese annals mention the name Kyrgyz before that of the Turk. This must be some kind of evidence that Kyrgyz may have existed before the Turks.” The aksakal’s question originated from the narrative that both the Soviet and the post-Soviet nationality projects used: the uniqueness of Kyrgyz people and their culture as opposed to that of Turks and other sedentary people like Uzbeks and Tajiks. The aksakal always smiled with satisfaction and proceeded with a “short course on the history of the Kyrgyz.”¹⁰⁴

Finally, the tradition of knowing one’s *sanjyra* or seven prior generations’ history made the narrative personal and unquestionable. The puzzling questions, however, are which aspects of this narrative Kyrgyz people saw as the “truth,” and why. How did this account of history vary across time and space, even in the subjectivity of a given individual? These localized official narratives pointed to two essential community

¹⁰³ Interviews with Kyrgyz aksakals who were in their late eighties: I. Irisov and M. Akishev on July 28, 1995, and with K. Narynov in May 17, 2002.

¹⁰⁴ See aksakals (Figure 20) on page 149.

features: ethnic names, which helped explain origins, and the importance of united Kyrgyz clans standing up to a number of powerful enemies. The construction of ancestry and the mythology of Kyrgyz forefathers during and after the Soviet period centered on “nomadic” Turkic and, to a lesser extent, Muslim communities.

During the construction of clubs in the 1920s, all administrators took issue with the way the state identified them: Kara Kyrgyz. Kazakhs were called Kyrgyz while actual Kyrgyz people were named Kara (Black) Kyrgyz by the authorities. The emphasis that Kyrgyz give to the origins of the Kyrgyz name exemplified how scholars of the Soviet era chose community characteristics that fit the ideology of the time and served specific “propaganda” purposes.¹⁰⁵ It is clear from the official correspondence that the similarities and differences between the two groups were beyond the comprehension of the authorities who came from other areas.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, the official categories of the ethnic and national groups would be simplified and clearly defined in Central Asia. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, such distinctions were not a priority. On the one hand, Kyrgyz administrators wanted their people to be recognized as Kyrgyz in order to receive educational materials that would suit their cultural and linguistic needs. On the other hand, they did not want to set their people too far apart from Kazakhs because of close ties between the two cultures. Displaying close ties with another Turkic people

¹⁰⁵ Many theories on the origin of the name proliferate, but the common theme among refers to Turkic myths on the words for “forty” (*kyrk*), “girl” (*kyz*) and “pasture” (*kyr*). No matter what the theory, Kyrgyz national community is always tied to an ancient Turkic past. State policy relied on how Kyrgyz pointed out the distinctness of their community even when they compared themselves with their closest nomadic relatives, Kazakhs. The differences between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were important to Kyrgyz. For a discussion on Kyrgyz ancestors see Talip Moldo, “Kyrgyz Taryhy, Uruuchuluk Kurulushu Türlüü Salttar,” 507-8; Aji, “Kyrgyz Sanjyrasy;” and Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi*, v. I, 411.

¹⁰⁶ “The Report of Kara Kol District, Political Education Committee on the activities of political education,” March 15, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 35, l. 28.

such as Kazakhs strengthened perceived Kyrgyz roots in the region and in the larger Turkic world. Establishing this balance was a difficult undertaking.

Both the issue of the ethnic origins of Kyrgyz and their linguistic peculiarities preoccupied Soviet administrators, especially those who were responsible for cultural affairs. They needed to define the language of instruction in Kyrgyz schools, clubs and other institutions of education. Russian language instruction was one of the main activities in clubs. The Altaic/Turkic language of Kyrgyz was not even a distant relative of the Slavic language of Russians. Kyrgyz needed to learn Russian in order to be taught and trained. Addressing this need, however, proved to be more complicated than the revolutionaries imagined. The revolutionary work had to confront such issues as the distinctions between the languages and dialects spoken in the south (Fergana Valley) and north (Chui Valley), and the multilingual populations who combined Turkic (Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Kazakh) and Persian (Tajik) languages. In the 1930s, club managers were instructed to promote the Russian language as the common language among the nationalities. The language in the documents requesting Russian language instruction emphasized that it was necessary to teach Russian for educational reasons.

The linguistic differences between the peoples of Central Asia would eventually help Soviet ethnographers define the region's geographical and political boundaries. Once these languages took on a written form, their differences became official. Although some of these differences were the artificial products of Soviet ethnographers and linguists, the nationalities ultimately learned to accept their officially-sanctioned national languages. In the Stalin Era, the nation-carving administrators, with the assistance of

ethnographers, highlighted and used these differences, rather than the similarities.¹⁰⁷

Historically subtle differences (as in languages and “ethnic customs”) between some nationalities such as the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs turned into modern community characteristics and became sources of national pride.

During the 1920s and 1930s, clubs attempted to establish cultural development as one of the main revolutionary activities in Kyrgyz ails. Club administrators even in the smallest ails took their jobs seriously and communicated their findings and problems to the regional offices. Their reports reflected the ambiguity of the ail communities regarding revolutionary work in clubs. The reports demonstrated that there were serious obstacles standing in the way of cultural education. The reports signaled that the regional leadership needed to be patient with the ail populations if they hoped for a significant change in ail traditions. Ail administrators indicated that without more substantial material support from the regional offices, they could not implement their directives. This behavior shows that ail administrators learned the meaning of revolutionary culture from the regulations, but they did not give up asserting what they knew about their own traditions. The early regulations lacked clarity regarding the meaning of revolutionary standards. Ail administrators also learned that they had to manage with what they had, both in terms of material means and human power. In the meantime, these administrators attempted to implement significant but gradual changes in traditionally-accepted behavior patterns and belief systems. Club administrators also attempted to combine state-initiated cultural development with common community characteristics such as the role of the

¹⁰⁷ For an elaboration of these policies see Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-making and the Formation of Soviet Nationalities.”

akyns in promoting a larger national Kyrgyz community over tribal alliances.

Community symbols such as *yr* (akyn's song) and the komuz became the central instruments of national presentation in the festivals honoring the nationalities, which the next chapter addresses.

A selected group of Kyrgyz cultural traditions eventually became the main representations of officially-sanctioned Kyrgyzness. As we will see in the following chapters, Kyrgyz clubs promoted behavior that was deemed national, such as national costumes, music and other ethnic, regional and ail traditions. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Kyrgyz girls and women represented their nationality by donning "national costumes."¹⁰⁸ The ethno-centric and sexualized representations of Kyrgyz culture were apparent in the national Olympiads, stage productions, and fictional stories and novels.¹⁰⁹ The official organization of nationalities did not allow non-Kyrgyz nationalities to question the role of the host as the primary culture (the titular nationality: Kyrgyz).

Finding and educating talented and loyal national cadres required clubs to combine what Kyrgyz considered national with what was acceptable to the state. This search for the "true Kyrgyz community" necessitated that the cadres once again turn to their ethnic traditions:

Organize at clubs, Red Chaikhanas, drama, music, literature, art, martial sports and chess circles. Identify the most talented national singers, story-tellers and musicians in these circles. Supply them with the necessary

¹⁰⁸ For parallel developments in establishing modern national (minority) communities in the PRC and Bulgaria, see Harell, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*; Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*; Gladney, *Making Majorities*; and Neuburger, *The Orient Within*. Similar policies took place in Bulgaria and People's Republic of China. Stalin's definition of nationality (common language, economy, culture, and psychological nature) influenced the national categories in the PRC.

¹⁰⁹ See Kyrgyz in their national costumes (Figure 21) on page 150.

national musical instruments, and encourage them to stage *ideologically* approved national plays. Bring the Kirghiz State Publishing houses together with the Union of Writers to add to the collection of revolutionary songs and plays. Establish a Republican Competition among the writers for the best play, performance, and poem.¹¹⁰

Clubs were to locate talents who were both loyal to the state and to their ethnic roots.

The irony is that all of this correspondence was in the Russian language, including those which encouraged the usage of the Kyrgyz language side-by-side with Russian.

Clubs, like the schools, had ethnic characteristics under Soviet tutelage which informed its members of Russian language regulations and rules and Soviet ideology at every turn. Official sources claimed that the culture of the Soviet citizens in Kyrgyzstan reflected the official discourse. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, these sources argued that each nationality viewed itself as distinct or “national in form,” but unified or “socialist in content:”

Kyrgyz people under the management of the Party have achieved decisive successes in all the areas of construction of socialism. The unprecedented growth of the material well-being of workers, kolkhozniks, and Soviet intelligentsia proves that *there is a blooming culture that is national in form and socialist in content*. Our happy people are in moral and political unity. They strengthen the power of the socialist state but do not forget about the capitalists all around us. They show complete readiness for defense of their native land against the initiators of war.¹¹¹

Beginning in the late 1920s, Tatar clubs in the city of Osh, for instance, staged Tatar song festivals but introduced the singers in Russian. Tatar language songs and costumes

¹¹⁰ “The Resolution of the Bureau of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks about a situation of cultural public work in village,” March 8, 1936, IML of TsKKPSS,, f. 10, op. 1, d. 1040, ll. 138-140.

¹¹¹ “The report of the Manager of Cultural Education Department of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia at the interregional meeting of cultural education workers about the working conditions of cultural education establishments in the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic,” December 4, 1938, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 1, d. 1165, ll. 105-137, 121.

symbolized their unique community, but speaking Russian instead of Kyrgyz demonstrated that they were Soviet citizens in Kyrgyzstan. This tradition survived until the end of the USSR. The Russian language was not only the language of bureaucracy but also the *lingua franca* of the Soviet nationality.

The replacement of cultural revolution with the “Great Terror” in the late 1930s targeted some national cadres for leadership in the bureaucracy, and some for the purges. A 1936 report indicates that the purging of “undesired elements” had been taking place throughout the second half of the 1930s:

Having discharged all unable and hostile class elements we are requested to establish the goal of selecting, preparing, and retraining of the staff of cultural educational work in order to comply with the regulations of the National Committee of Education, National Commissariat of Agriculture, Central Council of Physical Culture, and Regional Committee of VLKSM. We are to examine workers on their cultural education in the establishments of cultural education in a month's time. We are to prepare these establishments to examine, prepare, and place the appropriate workers in position within no less than two years.¹¹²

The cryptic language of the document only conveyed the process of selecting national cadres. But the following document indicated that this process was more dangerous than the language of the document communicated:

During the last ten days, the court has tried the spies and traitors of the Kyrgyz people who are bourgeois specialists, operating in the northern areas of Kirghizia. During the proceedings, it was revealed that the monstrous counter-revolutionary crimes were accomplished by the gang members of anti-Soviet nationalist "Socialist Turan Party." They were responsible for wrecking, supporting disorder in collective farms, creating national enemy groups, and a number of serious crimes. These gangsters

¹¹² “The Resolution of the Bureau of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks about a situation of cultural public work in village,” March 8, 1936, IML of TsKKPSS,, f. 10, op. 1, d. 1040, ll. 138-140.

worked under the orders of fascist executioners: Isakeiev, Chongbashev, and other villains. These gangsters tried to spill blood of workers in Kirghizia, to restore khans, bais, and manaps' authority, and tried to separate Kirghizia from the great family of the USSR. Exposed by the National Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), these gangsters were found guilty of all mentioned accusations. In the late evening of January 11, the special commission of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic sentenced these persons to be executed: Imambek Tekeiyev, Kurmanaly Kulumbaev, Toktakhun Sulpiev, Ismail Shyrdakov, Umurakhun Turdukulov, Shirmambet Syrykeiev, Osman Seitbekov, Ismail Tuibaev, and Israil Narymbaev. Tiul Bugubaev was sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment.¹¹³

These reports in newspaper articles were posted and read over and over in club meetings so that everyone knew who did not belong to the new Kyrgyz nation. Many official club documents, much like the official histories of Kyrgyz SSR, reiterated the following, making a distinct connection between arts, ideology, Kyrgyz community, and the terror years. Since the Bolshevik Revolution, the official rhetoric argued that there were “no professional arts in Kyrgyzstan before the Great October Revolution.” This official language suggested that it was Marxism-Leninism that brought out the national talents such as the akyns to the professional level. Most importantly, the discourse of the late 1930s added that Kyrgyz people succeeded in creating their own national and free culture because they stood up against those “Trotsky-Bukharin agents, the enemies of the people,” who wanted to wreck their cultural development.¹¹⁴

Throughout the 1930s, the national communities of Kyrgyzstan were formed under gradually increasing state controls that promoted the transformation of each national culture.¹¹⁵ Clubs were one of the institutions to carry out this so-called

¹¹³ *Batratskaia pravda*, January 22, 1938, 2.

¹¹⁴ Among many examples of official histories, see Zhanaliev, *Iskusstvo Sovetskoi Kirgizii*.

¹¹⁵ Lowe, “Nation Building and Identity in the Kyrgyz Republic,” 106-131.

transformation. Along the way, the nationalities found symbols and emphasized their significance to represent their culture. Clubs provided the venue for displaying such representations.¹¹⁶ Kyrgyz intelligentsia turned to their traditions, some long forgotten, to engender a national narrative. Once they found it, they were expected to transform it into something Soviet. Hence, the heroes of Kyrgyz became Soviet legends in the stories of Aitmatov; when asked about his hometown of Sheker and the importance of its traditions on him, Aitmatov said: "I never intended to write about Sheker directly, because art must always transform material. Only then is it art."¹¹⁷

Club administrators and other authorities challenged the very basis of Kyrgyz culture, such as nomadism, but occasionally ended up compromising. Creative people such as Aitmatov are products of a culture that emerged as a combination of the traditional and the modern. During the 1920s and 1930s, their parents prepared a society for them in which official definitions of Kyrgyzness were constantly contested and unstable. The authorities altered their promises and policies as they went along. It was obvious that nomadism was not going to disappear overnight, as many settled families regularly visited nomadic relatives in the remote mountains, out of the reach of the authorities. The job of clubs in smaller distant ails was especially difficult, because the image of the Kyrgyz nomad (and apparently some actual nomads) persisted even after decades of Russian and Soviet cultural influences. For many Kyrgyz people, this image represented both the heroic Kyrgyz nomad and the backwards and idle savage. For some, Kyrgyz way of life outlived the revolution that outsiders tried to impose upon them.

¹¹⁶ For modern phenomenon of "the invention of tradition," see Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Aitmatov, *The Time to Speak Out*, 61.

During my travels, my Kyrgyz hosts demonstrated that they were most proud of their indigenous nomadic Kyrgyz heritage.¹¹⁸ Still other Kyrgyz failed to adapt fully to *the modern way* of being and knowing.

This blending of the indigenous with what is perceived to be modern remained one of the main issues discussed in club meeting discussion that idolized the *bozüi*, the horse, the *kymyz*, and the *komuz* took center stage. It proved impossible for club administrators to separate nomadism from Kyrgyzness. For example, club managers routinely pointed out to the higher authorities that there were many Kyrgyz families who were not farming proletarians and as such did not believe in cultivating or living off the land beneath them. Instead of trying to impose a proletarian mentality among this nomadic population, they placed greater emphasis on national traditions, hoping to utilize them to enhance socialist messages. For example, they learned to manipulate Kyrgyz singers into incorporating official slogans into their improvised songs.

For a decade or more, club administrators consistently referred to nomadic traditions as archetypal representatives of Kyrgyz culture and insisted on the improvement of Kyrgyz artistic expressions. More than a decade after the establishment of the first clubs, club managers received resolutions such as this: on March 8, 1936, a resolution of the Bureau of the Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of CPK signaled that the national artistic traditions could not be ignored:

¹¹⁸ On a cool summer evening on 12 August 1995, on a mountaintop in the village of Papan, a seventy some year old *aksakal* summed it all up for me: "Why would a real Kyrgyz want to live in the big city or anywhere else? I have my horses, my *bozüi*, my *komuz*-playing grandchildren and a gourd full of *kymyz*. I am sitting less than an hour from the river in this clean and cool hilltop." In contrast, a college-educated friend in Bishkek, Jarkyn Jusupova, mocked a mutual acquaintance who kept his "Kyrgyz ways." She laughed at him when he was late for an important business appointment: "What does he know about anything? He should go to his *yurta*, pluck his *komuz* and drink his *kymyz*."

The Bureau of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks noticed the unsatisfactory situation of cultural education establishments in ails. It orders the Kyrgyz Narkompros and the Kyrgyz Industrial Council to improve the manufacturing of the Kyrgyz national musical instruments: komuz, *kyiak* and *choor*. The committee, also, orders ail clubs to organize drama, music, literature, art, military-sports, and chess circles, and leaves the management of these circles to talented national singers, story-tellers, and musicians. The clubs must supply them with necessary musical instruments, and *ideologically* appropriate plays and literature.¹¹⁹

Like imperial Russian administrators, Soviet administrators feared Kyrgyz traditions and attempted to stamp them out. These administrators, however, did not have a clear and well-defined policy in place. Moreover, ail members challenged them by remaining indifferent to new cultural norms, participating apathetically, and by steering cultural programs under the guise of cooperation to fit their own tastes, traditions, and purposes.¹²⁰ In effect, clubs encouraged Kyrgyz to go back to their indigenous culture to create their Soviet community.

¹¹⁹ "The Resolution of the Bureau of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks about a situation of cultural public work in ails," March 8, 1936, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 10, op. 1, d. 1040, ll. 138-140. See Kyrgyz national musical instruments (Figure 22) on page 151.

¹²⁰ For definitions of everyday resistance see Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.



FIGURE 17: Kyrgyz metalwork, source: *Unesco Central Asian Intangible Heritage Network* .

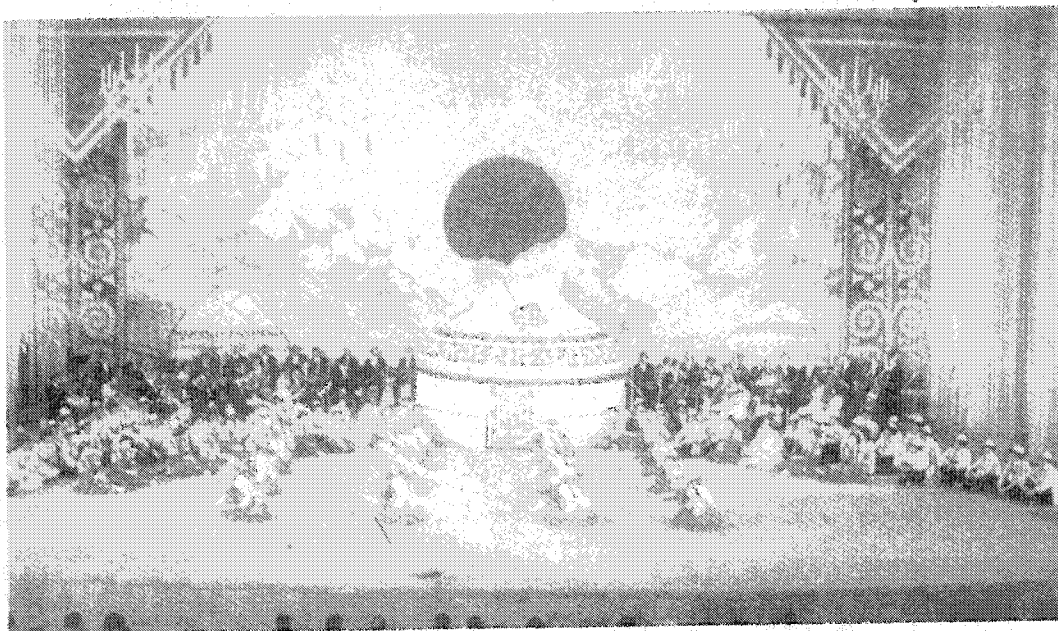


FIGURE 18: *Aichürök* Opera, source: *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*.

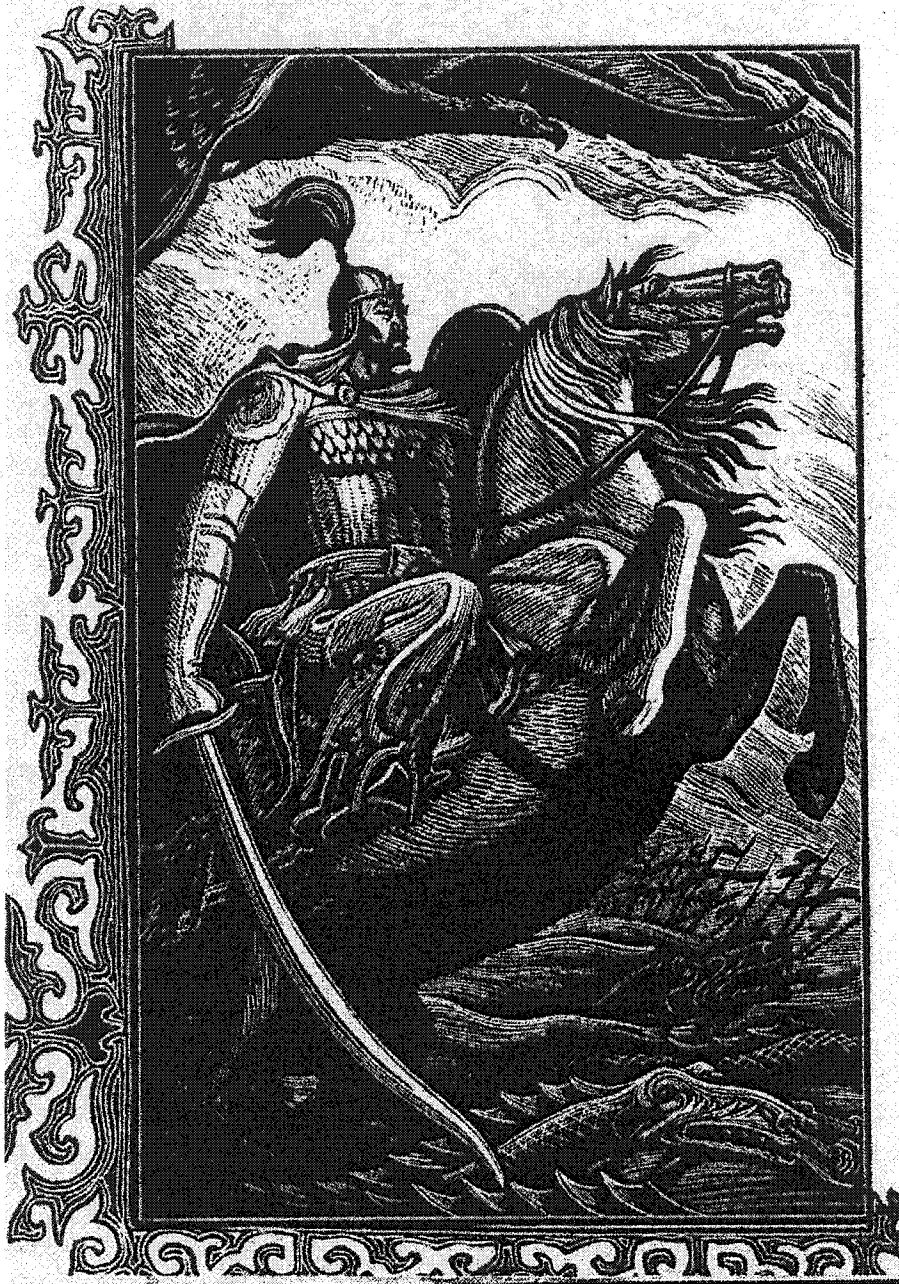


FIGURE 19: Manas, source: *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*.

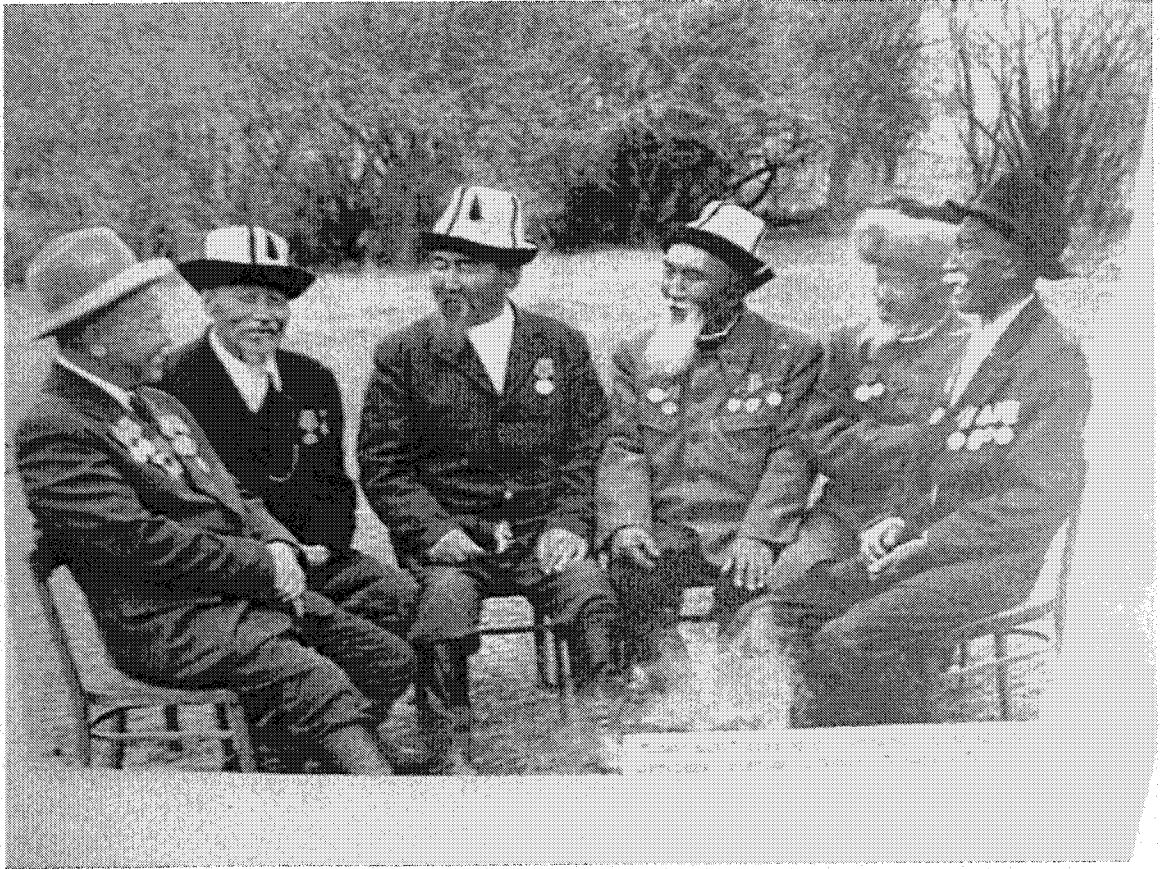


FIGURE 20: Aksakals, source: Tokmok House of Culture.



FIGURE 21: Kyrgyz National Costumes, source: Tokmok House of Culture.



FIGURE 22: Kyrgyz Musical Instruments, source: *Unesco Central Asian Intangible Heritage Network*.

CHAPTER FOUR

CELEBRATIONS IN SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN DURING THE 1930S

In Kyrgyz towns and ails, clubs and other Houses of Culture often served as the headquarters of Soviet celebrations. Reports from ail administrators and news stories in regional newspapers indicate that in the smallest ails, a school could provide the necessary space for a celebration, but the existence of a club (even if it was just a room) gave the celebration an official status.¹ In a news item that reported the result of a city Olympiad, for example, the reporter V. Tselikovskii called for the clubs to initiate and lead discussions for the betterment of cultural celebrations.²

The celebratory gatherings had become highly bureaucratic in the Stalin era and therefore required an official venue such as the club for the appearances of the high ranking officials of each town. Most celebrations included long speeches praising the Party and its achievements and shorter speeches honoring ail leaders and citizens, for accomplishments such as cotton-picking or horse-breeding. Kyrgyz workers, like their Russian counterpart Aleksei Stakhanov, a heroic coal-miner with a single-shift mining record, received awards in their ail clubs in front of their families and clan members.³ Club correspondence shows that regional administrators in charge of cultural events, such as these public award ceremonies and celebrations, advocated a policy of focusing on national heroes and specific features of regional cultural traditions that I discuss below.

¹ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, August, 18, 1938, 4. "Kyrgyz Cable Agency in Osh reports in Karasu local club the Third Regional Olympiad of national creativity was conducted. Seventy-eight singers, musicians, dancers and poets participated in the activities in the club."

² *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, August, 30, 1938, 4.

³ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941*, xii.

Participants were expected to perform or exhibit their “national” work in theaters, philharmonic societies, art schools and the newly established government-funded Houses of National Creativity.⁴ When the first Kyrgyz House of National Creativity opened its doors in 1938, the Party officially certified the organization and inspection of the Olympiads as its primary functions. As their name suggests, the ultimate purpose of these houses was to encourage “national creativity,” in other words, these new institutions were to become overseers of the smaller cultural houses like the clubs and to ensure that “nation-building through the arts” was taking place. The Houses also offered routine assistance to cultural establishments, providing procedural materials and professional instruction for the staff of the clubs and the other Houses of Culture.

This chapter argues that Olympiads and other festivals played a significant role in establishing regional cultural practices as legitimate expressions of Kyrgyz culture in the Kyrgyz SSR. Studying these celebrations, therefore, offers a specific opportunity for exploring the theme of fashioning, performing, and practicing Kyrgyzness.⁵ Stalin’s celebrations provided a medium for Kyrgyz artists to respond to the state’s cultural policies while reviving indigenous artistic expressions.⁶

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyzes club documents in order to examine the ways in which the celebrations followed the official

⁴ Daniyarov, *Osushchestvleniie Leninskoi programmy kul'turnoi revoliutsii v Kirgizii*, 205.

⁵ Robert Conquest has asserted that Stalin’s celebrations acted as distractions from the purges and the other excessive policies of the Party. Conquest’s suggestion is apt, but there were also other agendas, at least in the Kyrgyz SSR. Event organizers in Kyrgyz clubs and other participating institutions attempted to expand the influence of regional Houses of Culture, educate workers, and facilitate the everyday operations of the cultural institutions. For a detailed discussion of the reasons and legacy of Stalin’s terror among non-Russian nationalities, see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*.

⁶ Karen Petrone has argued that the Soviet state utilized traditional, pre-Soviet, values in official celebrations in order to promote Soviet ideals. For an in-depth analyses of Stalinist celebrations, see Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*.

script; the second section examines how the content of the celebrations diverged in significant ways from this official script. I argue that there was some degree of negotiation between the center, regional administrators, and heads of clubs in setting up the celebrations. The chapter returns to the official representation of these first-hand experiences, namely archival documents, and examines official correspondence that included regulations, news reports and club managers' reports on the Olympiads and other national events, such as *dekady* (ten-day festivals). Olympiads were public celebrations of the Soviet system that emphasized the merging of socialism and national community. Dekady were state-sanctioned celebrations that were designed to display a comprehensive exhibition of ethnic arts during a ten-day holiday. They were one of the several public celebrations that became prominent during the 1930s.

The focus of the chapter is on the records of: the Third Kyrgyz Olympiad, held in August 1938, and the smaller, localized festivals, which were designed to prepare the participants for larger Olympiads. I chose the Third Olympiad because it is the first full-fledged national festival of the 1930s. The dekady and other localized and Olympiads, on the other hand, provide a case study for the types of grassroots responses to public celebrations of the 1930s.

During the 1930s, Kyrgyz of all ages had first-hand experience with public celebrations because schools, clubs, and other educational institutions participated in the preparation of these events. In 1936, the first Olympiad of National Creativity took place in Kyrgyzstan; it drew 150 participants and became a yearly celebration of regional arts and crafts. The number of participants increased to approximately 300 participants

during the second Olympiad.⁷ By the time of the third Olympiad in August 1938, there were more than 500 participants and spectators, including 160 of them women.⁸

One of the early documents on such celebrations demonstrates the priorities for these events. A 1934 report of the Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Union Lenin Komsomol outlines the objectives of the Performing and Visual Arts Olympiad of the Komsomol. First, the report establishes the administrative hierarchy with the announcement of the Olympiad organization under the leadership of the secretary of the provincial committee of the Communist Party, Törökul Aitmatov, father of the writer Chingiz Aitmatov and a locally respected leader who had become an important Soviet cadre. The report refers to the successful creation of the national theater in the republic and to the need to strengthen the theater so that it would deserve the name Kyrgyz State Theater and train young people such as Komsomol members. Second, the report lists the development of Kyrgyz and Russian drama circles and clubs that would train Komsomol actors in these languages and cultural traditions, preparing them for participation in public celebrations. Third, the report announces a respectable number of Komsomol circles in every region and provides a breakdown of their members according to various categories such as “agitation brigades” or “kolkhozniks.” Finally, the report on the Olympiad registered a complaint: “The actors in the Theater of Young Workers are involved in these circles. However, the work of these circles is still far from satisfactory. The explanation for this is the absence of leadership and repertoire in the Kyrgyz

⁷ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, November 8, 1937, 1.

⁸ Toktogonov, *Stanovlenie i razvitie sotsialisticheskoi kul'tury sovetskogo Kyrgyzstana*, 10-25.

language.”⁹ The report exemplifies the goals of an appropriate Soviet celebration in accordance with the official hierarchy, from the top official Aitmatov, who was a national success story, to the smallest Komsomol acting circle of the Kyzyl Kyia mining ail.

The official purpose of the celebrations dictated that the “political education” of the Kyrgyz nation was to ensue in conjunction with its cultural education. Cultural celebrations and political education activities were like conjoined twins: they each had their own mind but were unable to function separately. This was apparent in the reports of political education committees, which often reflected that the goals of political education coincided with those of cultural education. Most of the reports explicitly or implicitly note that without political education the culture of the people could not be “improved.” Ideologically, “Stalin was the teacher of the workers” and the education commissars were his assistants.¹⁰ These commissars, with the aid of enthusiastic artists, organized revolutionary celebrations. In this context, to celebrate was to educate. Many Soviet artists actively participated in shaping the Bolshevik celebrations, seeing endless opportunities for their personal artistic expressions.¹¹

A Party decree from the end of the 1930s on the organization of All-Kyrgyz Olympiads summarized that the interconnectedness of cultural growth and political education needed to be emphasized in all celebrations:

Among the kolkhoz, sovkhoz and MTS (Machine Tractor Stations) members, the ability of amateur performances is growing quickly, and

⁹ “The Report of the Department of Culture and Propaganda of the Kara Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Union Lenin *Komsomol* (VLKSM) on the implementation of the Resolution of Asian Regional Committee of the All-Union Lenin *Komsomol* regarding the Cultural and General Services Conference and Musical and Artistic Olympiad,” March 1, 1934, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 3, d. 149, ll. 91-94.

¹⁰ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January, 1, 1936, 1.

¹¹ Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Celebrations, 1917-1920*, 45.

new budding talents are revealed. The kolkhoz theaters are producing valuable work in serving the kolkhoz members as the masses have been growing considerably and getting stronger.

These are important issues and worthy of special attention. Most often, the regional and party organizations do not know about the talented people of their region, and do not render them the necessary education. The art collectives work without a proper schedule in most cases. The Republic's House of National creativity seems to stay idle instead of providing organizational and methodical assistance and to amateur performers.¹²

The decree included a twelve-item to-do list for regional organizers. The list of items, however, did not provide any clear strategies or methods to guide administrators, instead, it contained phrases such as "to provide wide participation of the kolkhoz masses and the whole community" and "to engage in revealing and registering the most talented and gifted people of the region." The decree was clear, however, when it referred to the political requirements in phrases such as "to pay special attention to the inspection of the repertoire of the selected participants" and "to assign the responsibility of inspecting the conduct of the participants at the regional festivals to the Head of the Department of Arts Affairs (Comrade Klich)."

The ideology behind Soviet public celebrations went through various phases. In the 1920s, artistic activity and creativity thrived, albeit limited by Bolshevik norms, and this relative artistic freedom found an outlet in carnival-like celebrations. At the same time, David L. Hoffman and Von Geldern have shown that during this period, Bolshevik intellectuals debated the usefulness of such flamboyant celebrations. Originally, the Bolsheviks had intended revolutionary celebrations to function as educational and

¹² "The Decree of the Bureau of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia on the Organization of All Kyrgyz Olympiad and Republican Celebration of Collective Farm Theaters," August 28, 1938, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 19.

promotional events that would “agitate” and entertain the people.¹³ Von Geldern has pointed out that “in their missionary zeal, the Bolsheviks intended them as a school of socialist ideas.”¹⁴ As Von Geldern has demonstrated, revolutionary states such as that of the Bolsheviks demand a festive atmosphere in order to make an impression on the populations.¹⁵ Many of the festivities during Bolshevik celebrations needed to contain elements of pre-revolutionary artistic expressions such as poetry readings and the staging of heroic plays in order to spark the interest of the populations.

Stalin-era celebrations of the 1930s were larger in scale and more diverse in content than earlier festivals. They attempted to stamp out any resemblance to pre-revolutionary expression. The Soviet government promoted large-scale festivals that included “physical culture” demonstrations.¹⁶ The mass celebrations were renamed “Olympiads” in the 1930s. The Olympiads and *dekady* introduced a new celebratory discourse and practice which would replace Bolshevik celebrations. The late 1920s and early 1930s brought Stalin’s infamous assault on “bourgeois specialists” a category that included artists and intellectuals. The 1930s began with the collectivization drive and a subsequent famine and ended with the purges. From the citizen’s point of view, there were few reasons to celebrate. The government did not see it the same way, however: at the beginning of 1937, directives from Moscow ordered hard-working Soviet people to enjoy their newly found prosperity. After all, from their perspective, the industrialization

¹³ Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Celebrations, 1917-1920*, 44. For more on the interpretation of Stalinist celebrations, see Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941*.

¹⁴ Also see Corney, *Telling October*. The timing of this dissertation did not allow full consideration of Corney’s recent book. Nevertheless, it should be examined in this context.

¹⁵ Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Celebrations, 1917-1920*, 45.

¹⁶ For more on “physical culture” demonstrations see Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*.

and collectivization drives had been successful, and many of the enemies of the country had been purged. It was time to celebrate, and what better way than to gather the deserving Soviet people in festivals and Olympiads.

Due to the encouragement of the state, Kyrgyz painters, sculptors, musicians, poets and writers, like their counterparts in the rest of the Soviet Union, recognized the potential for personal and national artistic advancement. Celebrations provided new possibilities for incorporating ethnic, national, and political expressions on stage and through other mediums like sculpture and painting. As a result, many willing artists took advantage of the celebrations and appeared to accept the political messages. Their artistic expressions helped fashion the nature and shape of the celebrations, while they were told that these events facilitated “the maturation of their art as Soviet art.”

Celebrating Kyrgyzness According to the Rules

The Bolshevik leaders wanted the people of the Soviet Union to remember and celebrate the October Revolution. Acknowledging the power of public celebration in constructing unity among the people, the Party created revolutionary holidays.¹⁷ The celebration of the October Revolution, International Labor Day (May Day) and Women’s Day were first among these holidays. According to Richard Stites and James Von Geldern, these holidays had an element of spontaneity that Stalin’s policies eliminated at the end of the 1920s.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Corney, *Telling October*.

¹⁸ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, and idem, “Festival and Revolution: the Role of Public Spectacle in Russia, 1917-1918,” 9-28. A popular joke might give us a sense of how Stalin-era celebrations killed the enthusiasm of the 1920s: “At the May Day celebrations in Frunze, a handful of Kyrgyz aksakals were carrying a banner that read: ‘Thank You, Comrade Stalin, For a Happy Childhood.’ A confused Komsomol turned to them and said: ‘Have you all gone senile? Stalin was not even born when you were children.’”

In the pre-Stalin period, the Party turned to a number of enthusiasts such as theater actors who wanted to take active roles in such remembrances and celebrations.

Lenin wrote:

Revolutions are celebrations of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles.¹⁹

The Party wanted miracles especially from the “oppressed and exploited” non-Russians to prove that the Soviet system would not repeat the colonial past. Organizing mass celebrations in such confusing times in Central Asia must have been quite an achievement for people who were involved in creating them.

The dominant theme of decrees and reports was the development and improvement of conditions among the Kyrgyz. For example, economic and political developments would bring the promise of cultural liberation from the past: the people could only be liberated if they opened their eyes to the political and socio-economic realities that had enslaved them.

The state counted on national artists and writers of their generation to create works of art that depicted economic and social developments, so success stories about the economic and social revolution in “backwards” regions became standard descriptions of development in Kyrgyz fiction. These so-called success stories were to be celebrated in the festivals with the help of painters and sculptors who showed artwork depicting the

One of the aksakals responded: ‘That is the reason we are saying ‘thank you,’ my clever boy.’ Although I heard this joke from Bakyt Burkutov on September 12, 1995, it was remarkable that a sense of irony or an act of defiance such as this survived for so many generations. For more jokes about the Soviet system, see Karybaev, *Anekdottor* and Deniz-Yilmaz, “Siyasi Fikralar.”

¹⁹ Lenin, “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution,” 9/113. (I owe this quote to James von Geldern.)

achievements and the “happiness” of their nations. During the 1930s ail festivals, club walls exhibited paintings of prosperity that showcased, for example, a healthy and confident female shopkeeper behind a counter full of *nan* (Central Asian bread).²⁰ Similarly, lithographs and paintings depicted Kyrgyz boys enjoying their catch-of-the-day from a stream.²¹ Writers also did their part during the 1930s to create images that established the celebratory feeling of Soviet successes in Kyrgyzstan. One such writer of the post-Stalin era, Aitmatov, wrote stories that evoked the celebrated days of agricultural development. One of Aitmatov’s protagonists, Ilyas, a truck driver, described those glorious days:

We were on our way to Frunze with an expedition to explore the improvement of Anarkhay steppe as a potential pasture and farmland. The expedition was to go deep into the steppe and reach all the way to Lake Balkhash. In three and a half years we transformed Anarkhay pasture. We built beautiful roads, dug wells, and started machine tractor stations. Long story short, that Anarkhay steppe, full of monotonous wormwood-covered hills, turned into something entirely different. It used to be a wasteland, where a person could get lost even in broad daylight for months. Today, it has become the home of farmers and livestock workers with its comfortable houses and the Houses of Culture.²²

This almost utopian town that Ilyas and his expedition created actually existed in Kyrgyzstan. Aitmatov’s description of Anarkhay could apply to many a town in Kyrgyzstan. Expeditions such as Ilyas’s were undertaken by young workers who built collective farms, clubs, reading huts, or Houses of Culture. These Houses, in turn, disseminated socialist ideology by organizing new types of entertainment and education

²⁰ See the 1930 painting of A. Osmonov, *Nan dükönündö* in Oruzbayeva, *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*, Figure 4 on p. 416. (Figure 23) on page 178.

²¹ See the 1920 painting of S. A. Chuikov, *Mal’chik s pyboi*, in Popova, *Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*, Figure 70. (Figure 24) on page 179.

²² Aitmatov, *Kyzyl Jooluk Jaljalym* (*My Poplar in the Red Scarf* was first published in 1961, in Russian as *Pvesti gor i stepei*). See a lithograph depicting a scene from road construction in Karasu by A. A. Sgibnev, *Kara-Suiskii ugol’nii razrez*. (Figure 25) on page 180.

that would introduce ideology to their members. These were the primary institutions that prepared ail participants for national celebrations. Well after the Stalinist era, stories like Aitmatov's have continued to contribute to the creation of the celebrated Soviet past. While fashioning a past such as this, both the paintings and short stories forged a new Kyrgyz community that incorporated Kyrgyz *turmush* (ordinary everyday behavior), such as baking flat bread and catching fresh-water fish, with so-called modern, ideology-laden Soviet projects, such as building a club in an ail.

Most of the celebrations in Kyrgyzstan revolved around several elements that the commissars emphasized. A hierarchy of issues dominated: in her analysis of Stalinist celebrations, Karen Petrone has listed gender, nationality, history, culture and heroes as key categories.²³ Petrone's categories apply to the Kyrgyz case, but they were juxtaposed differently than they were in Russia.²⁴ In the Kyrgyz case, for example, celebration of the Soviet successes constituted the main theme but references to specific Kyrgyz success stories created national heroes and a new historical narrative for Kyrgyzstan. This narrative included the promotion of Kyrgyz community, traditions, history, and heroes, which supported the image of the multinational Soviet people. By "nationalizing" regional heroes and their achievements, the celebrations honored and emphasized the distinctiveness of each ethnicity.²⁵ The recognition of specific developments and

²³ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*, 14-16. Petrone has shown that the Stalinist government emphasized political changes (the new Stalin Constitution), military preparedness (Air Force and Navy Days), and scientific achievements (Arctic Aviation Day) as causes for commemoration.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 206. Petrone's most insightful argument is that the state sought the promotion of Soviet values in the celebration of traditional values, older influential figures, and respected institutions. Her best case in point was Pushkin as a celebratory figure, demonstrating that Stalin era celebrations promoted pre-revolutionary values. At the same time, the Pushkin Centennial of 1937 upheld the most distinguished author of the tsarist era as a class-conscious figure.

particular achievements in each ethnic region localized and completed the celebration.²⁶ Because of these ethnic distinctions, Kyrgyz celebrations differed from Russian ones, especially with regards to women: in Muslim regions like Kyrgyzstan the emancipation of women became the highlight of the celebrations because Muslim women's so-called "freedom" symbolized a break with old traditions.

Clubs were essential in setting the stage for Stalin-era celebrations in Kyrgyzstan that brought forward the "national identity" issue. Celebrations categorized the nationalities according to their service to the Soviet Union, making the Soviet hierarchy apparent.²⁷ Petrone has demonstrated the contrast in the portrayals of regions participating in the celebrations. The themes reflected each nationality's role in the Soviet Union: those who lived on important borders, such as Armenia, marched proudly as the defenders of the Union while displaying their national heritage, while the Central Asians were only allowed to present themes that exhibited agricultural achievements. Kyrgyz clubs prepared their members to put on shows that depicted cotton-picking rituals and harvest-time festivities. Although they could not do so in Moscow, in regional celebrations and *dekady*, the Central Asians were able to celebrate their national histories.

The commemoration of Soviet achievements dominated the Olympiads and *dekady*. In 1935, Stalin declared, "life is becoming merrier;" it was the time of celebration. Stalin named 1936 the year of the *Stakhanovites* and ordered them to

²⁶ For definitions and creation of nationhood during during the Stalin era and the twentieth century, see Eley and Suny, *Becoming National* (Specifically Slezkine's article "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.") Also see Martin, "Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism."

²⁷ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*, 34-39.

celebrate their successes.²⁸ Newspaper articles in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* made

Stakhanovites the heroes of the celebrations by publishing their names, nationalities and successes:

Fundamental changes have taken place not only in the economy, but also in the consciousness of the people. New heroes are budding among the large masses of people. If the hero of the First Five-Year Plan was a shock-worker, the hero of the Second Five-Year Plan is a Stakhanovite. The numbers of these new heroes are growing in Kirghizia too. The best of them were awarded the Supreme Awards of the Soviet Union: Lenin's Order, Red Banner, and Mark of Honor.²⁹

This article praised the heroes who achieved the highest yield of crops such as comrades Kadyrbek Sadyrbekov and Kanimet Sagymbaeva (Kyrgyz), and Phuimuer Suvaza and Mafhlen Juvuz (Dungans). The best livestock-breeders included comrade Natal'ia Belikova, the best pig-tender at the Karl Marx Sovkhoz, and comrade Toktosunov, the best shepherd at the Il'ich Sovkhoz. The article listed the milkmaids who milked 3000 liters and the shepherds who bred over 500 lambs and concluded that "today's objective is to cherish them."³⁰ This phase demonstrates that regional celebrations and larger Olympiads "cherished" and paraded these heroes as both heroes of the Soviet Union and as the best representatives of their nationalities. Ironically, although the state articulated the Stakhanovites in a national context, none of the Kyrgyz achievements in coal mining or industry matched the alleged heroism of the original Stakhanovite, Aleksei.

In spite of some rarely reported irregularities discussed below, my documents indicate that most celebrations met the official purposes. According to regional

²⁸ For more on Stakhanovism, see Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941*.

²⁹ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January, 1, 1936, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

nationalities commissars in Frunze, the affirmation of each nationality was stronger if they displayed their “national talents” to each other; the Olympiads provided the best venue for such activity. Reports of all administrators suggested that the Olympiads allowed the people of Kyrgyzstan, including women and children, to participate for the first time in an ethnically diverse public event. According to the administrators, all populations were able to express their unique talents through songs, dances, oral epics and national instruments. The official rhetoric suggested that Kyrgyz enjoyed and appreciated each other’s carpets, woven fabrics, embroidery, and woodwork; artistic circles of various clubs performed music and staged plays. During my interviews, I was surprised to find out that during such celebrations many people were, in fact, exposed to other regions’ arts and crafts for the first time.³¹ A scholar of Kyrgyz culture, Vladimir Iankovskii, has estimated that in 1938, Kyrgyz clubs nationally initiated four dance troupes, 250 drama circles, 91 choral groups, and 61 music circles to practice actively their art.³² Many of these musicians performed in jazz and brass bands, string quartets, small orchestras, and special musical groups like the Uzbek orchestral ensemble. According to the official reports, as a result of these activities, regional traditions and Western art forms were beginning to meld together.

Another major element of official celebrations was the highlighting of regional success stories. Holidays offered administrators the opportunity to localize larger national government policies. Small regional festivals organized by the clubs served the

³¹ On July 13, 1995, I interviewed a group of officials in Osh (southern Kyrgyzstan) who were preparing a three-story bozūi for “The 1000th Year of Manas Celebrations.” Many of the officials were in their forties and fifties. They all agreed that such celebrations became a tradition in the early Soviet era and that their families had their first actual exposure to northern Kyrgyz traditions during Soviet festivals.

³² Iankovskii, *Muzykal'naia kul'tura Sovetskoi Kirgizii, 1919-1967 gg.*

Party's goals of politically educating the populations. In the late 1930s, a significant number of Kyrgyz people, especially women, remained illiterate; club festivities celebrating successes such as women's liberation served, at least in theory, to introduce women to revolutionary ideology.

Negotiating the Nature of Official Celebration

At the Karasuu Ail Club, the Third Regional Olympiad of National Creativity was conducted. Seventy-eight singers, musicians, dancers and akyns participated. Comrade Akpayev, a sixty-year-old akyn from the Tel'man Kolkhoz, performed most successfully. His sonorous and bright verses praised the riches of the collective farm and the prosperous and happy life of collective farmers. The best participants of the Olympiad received awards. Seven of them, among them a *saimachy* Comrade Jumabayeva, will go for Frunze for the "All-Kyrgyz Olympiad."³³

The national newspaper praised an aged akyn and a young *saimachy*, an artist of traditional embroidery, for their performances at the Third Regional Olympiad in 1938. Their performances incorporated two essential features that the organizers of the national Olympiads and other Soviet celebrations expected from "national artists:" they validated the Soviet way of life in their specific region and applied socialist themes to their ethnic or national arts. Both Akpayev and Jumabayeva, who were lauded in the above quoted article from *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, participated in keeping indigenous art forms alive while presenting them as components of Soviet art.

It is difficult to know whether these artists whole-heartedly believed in socialist themes. Nevertheless, their accounts mirrored the enthusiastic language of the official documents. In accordance with central directives, regional administrators ordered club

³³ "The Olympiad of National Creativity in Kara Suu," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, August 18, 1938, 4. *Saimachy* means an embroidery artist in Kyrgyz.

managers and school administrators to prepare their ail populations to participate in plays, sports activities, and art exhibits during mass celebrations. And, in turn, club managers of ails sent reports to regional superiors, informing them of their progress and requesting assistance in preparing the population for such large cultural events.

A report of September 8, 1938, emphasized that the celebrations functioned as public arenas for “all nationalities” to show their talents and demonstrate their brotherhood with the Kyrgyz people. “The report of the Kyrgyz Republic’s House of National Creativity on the results of the Third Olympiad” declared that “our country that achieved socialism and genuine democracy provides all the necessary means and conditions to its people so that they are able to display their artistic creativity and their amateur talents, producing a diverse result like a magnificently colorful carpet.” It defined the Olympiad as “a method of displaying artistic creative power of the people.”³⁴ It suggested that “besides their artistic and political importance, the Olympiads have a practical character” that allows the participants, called delegates, to unearth their best artistic talents that may have been hidden in the past.

Nonetheless, reports of Kyrgyz Olympiad administrators on the Third Olympiad in 1938 revealed several important realities of ails. The first problem was related to participation: non-Party members still constituted the majority of the artistic delegates who came from outside of Frunze, an indication that Party members from participating ails were not as active as the Party would like them to be. The second problem was financial: there was not enough money to pay for all of the artistic activities. The most

³⁴ “The Report of the Kyrgyz Republic’s House of National Creativity on the Results of Third Olympiad of National Creativity in the Kyrgyz Republic,” September 8, 1938, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 1, d. 1163, ll. 82-83.

pressing issue was not related to participation or finances but rather to ideology: the Olympiads were to be the ultimate celebration and the platform of “the brotherhood of nationalities,” which meant that all the ethnicities in the Kyrgyz SSR needed to be represented and celebrated together.

The slim participation of Party members in celebrations is evident in many reports. The reports emphasized the large number of collective farmers and the authentic performances of a variety of nationalities while downplaying the small number of Party members attending. The Party’s ultimate purpose was to increase the number of Party members in their ails, but reports demonstrated that growth in membership, at least in ails far from the capital, was still sluggish. The language of the reports, however, attempted to shift the emphasis away from this problem. The list of the participating delegates showed that there were only two Party members, 160 Komsomol members, and ten pioneers. There were, however, 261 participants who were not Party members.³⁵ The report mentioned this serious issue only in passing, while instead highlighting the wealth of ethnic representation in the event; for example, the list of 13 attending nationalities was prominently placed in the report and the unity of the nationalities was praised.³⁶

National creativity experiences an extraordinary rise. It was never and nowhere celebrated as emphatically as it is in our country. The high level of national creativity warrants it...The creativity of Kyrgyz people is identical to the creativity of all other nationalities settled in the Kyrgyz Republic. The request of the manager of the exhibition committee is quite clear about displaying national amateur creativity of all united nationalities, including Kyrgyz at the All-Union agricultural exhibition in the city of Moscow.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. (The List of Participating Nationalities: Kyrgyz: 249, Russian: 56, Uzbek: 42, Ukrainian: 22, Tatar: 8, Kalmyk: 3, German: 3, Polish: 2, Kazakh: 2, Kurdish: 2, Turkish: 2, Gypsy: 1, Dungan: 1; total: 393).

³⁷ Ibid.

It also proudly listed the number of Kyrgyz collective farmers participating: 281, more than any other ethnic group. The report also remarked on the diversity of the age groups among the delegates. The youngest delegate was a six-year-old female dancer and the oldest an eighty-one-year-old aksakal who played the komuz. In other words, despite the low number of Party member participants, the administrators found a few things to brag about. The emphasis was on a unified body politic despite ostensible differences such as age, ethnicity, and gender.

Official emphasis on the contribution of a large number of nationalities helped administrators ignore deficiencies in Party-member participation, as well as a lack of resources. Not all authors of reports, however, managed to avoid the mention of the problem of inadequate resources; various reports discussed the lack of financial and material support in order to accentuate so-called “miracles” about which Lenin wrote, that emerged despite such hurdles. According to the authors of these reports, the “miracle” showed the unbreakable human will of the poor Kyrgyz people who attended the Olympiad.³⁸

The Third Olympiad expected 500 delegates from other regions, but only 393 attended. One report blames the executive committees of various raions for failing to provide their delegates with adequate funds to cover their travel expenses, but then it also turns to the miraculous dedication of the Soviet people: “Three delegates from the Jumgal raion walked 200 kilometers for four days through the mountain passes to Frunze,

³⁸ Ibid.

because their executive committees failed to distribute sufficient funds for their trip.”³⁹ Accommodations and incentives for the delegates was also an issue during the Third Olympiad. This report indicated that the House of Creativity had failed to provide any spaces or beds for the delegates, who were forced to sleep in the House of Peasants, the Circus, and even at the office of the House of Creativity. The “National Minorities Choikhonas” fed the delegates. The organizers hoped that the incentives they provided would alleviate resentment due to accommodations and food: at the end of the celebration, juries presented diplomas to two collectives and 72 delegates, and financial awards to seven collectives and 51 delegates (10,000 rubles in total).

The three delegates from Jungal rewarded the whole organization by showing up despite all odds --they were the “miracle makers.” These three “joyous entertainers” and their sacrifice symbolized of the changing times and trends in the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the ideology of asceticism and iron willpower did not allow Soviet citizens to be outwardly “festive” in celebrations, but even the Spartan celebrations of the early Bolshevik era would have rewarded these three delegates. But this was also the time when “life is becoming merrier.” Like many other delegates at the Olympiad, the three delegates refused to give up on this state-sanctioned occasion to celebrate their own successes. In a way, they were the Stakhanovites of this event. Although this report did not list the names of award winning delegates, these men were recognized as heroes.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

According to the report, the Third Olympiad demonstrated how multinational the Kyrgyz population had become, an issue that official rhetoric emphasized. The report indicated that the diverse nationalities with their regional traditions and flair added color to the celebrations. Diverse traditions were evident in these occasional feasts that each ail offered according to their customs and economic capabilities.⁴¹ In Kyrgyzstan and most of Central Asia, the feasts represented respect and hospitality, even in the poorest of ails.⁴² Southern feasts most often reflected the Uzbek tradition of serving *osh* or *palov* (rice pilaf traditionally prepared by men) and *samsa* (meat stuffed pie).⁴³ Northern celebrations offered *boorsok* (Kyrgyz and Kazakh traditional fried bread). The inclusion of such traditions gave an indigenous twist to stuffy and routine state celebrations, and this assessment report shows that they continued in the 1930s.

Despite the government's continuous attack on religious holidays, club members occasionally managed to sneak in familial, tribal, ethnic, and even religious celebrations.⁴⁴ A 1939 report on Kyrgyz club activities hinted at "irregularities" without explaining the types of violations:

⁴¹ For the fate of traditional regional rituals such as Nouruz during the Soviet-era, see Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society, the Soviet Case*.

⁴² I interviewed Mukhtar Irisov in Papan ail after a wedding party on June 17, 1995. Irisov argued that the hospitality that was extended to me at this wedding was one of the most important Kyrgyz traditions that survived the Soviet period. He said: "The Russians could not eradicate our basic traditions, like our feasts. Instead they learned to enjoy our food."

⁴³ Visson, *The Art of Uzbek Cooking*, 8.

⁴⁴ For more detailed discussion on Soviet policy against Islamic holidays see Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*. Traditional holidays and celebrations were in constant danger from government policies, however. The Union of Militant Godless declared that Muslim holidays and celebrations (such as the sacrifice of sheep and cattle) "wrecked" socialist ideals and modes of behavior. The Godless concentrated their anti-religious campaigns in schools. Shoshana Keller has shown that the efforts of the Godless to use schools to abolish or modify the Muslim celebrations of *Ramadan* and *Qurban* (in Uzbek and *Kurban* in Kyrgyz) were largely unsuccessful during the 1930s. As a result, the Godless changed tactics, using mass propaganda in their campaign rather than only visiting schools and clubs. Keller has asserted, however, that public demonstrations, radio lecture and films were more effective in the agitation work against

In the districts of Batken, Kara Suu, Naryn, Alai, Balykchy, Aravan, Karavan, Ala-Buka, and Üch-Terek the activities of clubs and reading huts do not satisfy the political needs of the workers. The chiefs of these clubs and reading huts, instead of organizing activities with political substance, are neglecting their visitors with apolitical activities, ignoring the club economy.⁴⁵

This report referred to apolitical activities which would indicate that the managers of clubs were involved in organizing, or at least permitting, events that were not necessarily officially sanctioned.⁴⁶ Another possible a so-called irregularity to which this report referred was indigenous ethnic celebrations in some of these districts. The southwestern district of Batken, for example, had significant Uzbek and Tajik populations who remained loyal to their elaborate holidays.⁴⁷ The absence of detail in this official accusation of irregularity indicated, however, that reporting of such unofficial events might have been dangerous for ail and regional leaders.

Theater, dance and choral singing, previously unfamiliar to most Kyrgyz, made their official debut on Soviet stage during the Olympiads. The Third Olympiad gathered a large group of women, men, and children of many ethnic groups. This type of event was still new to the region. Traditionally, Uzbek and Tajik Muslim or Jewish populations gathered in small groups for religious holidays like the Nawruz or Nouruz (celebrating the coming of Spring), and the celebrations of family milestones of such as circumcision,

holidays. She has argued that during the Great Break period (1931-35) in Uzbekistan the clubs and Choikhonas continued anti-*Ramadan* and anti-*Qurban* campaigns.

⁴⁵ "The decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia about Condition of Cultural and Educational Establishments in the Republic," January 4, 1939, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 4, d. 255, ll. 13-15.

⁴⁶ It is difficult to know the real nature of these events because my sources lack such detail. The people I interviewed, however, reported that they recalled celebrating family events in their club houses when they were children (For this, I rely on my interviews with M. Irisov, Z. Aliyeva, and others.)

⁴⁷ For interviews on people's experiences regarding Uzbek and Tajik traditional celebrations, see Tokhtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova, *The Daughters of Amazons*; and Harris, *Control and Subversion*.

engagement, marriage and Jewish coming-of-age ceremonies. Formerly nomadic populations like Kyrgyz and Kazakhs also observed Muslim holidays with a pre-Islamic flair. It was one of the objectives of the Olympiads to absorb the indigenous spirit of celebration and related activities. The Third Olympiad, on a greater scale, forced indigenous ideas of entertainment and education out of mostly private and ethnically segregated spaces, and into the so-called multinational public sphere.

In conclusion, the report on the Third Olympiad gave it a mixed review. It argued that the event achieved some goals but failed at others. On one hand, it gathered the largest number of delegates since the commencement of the Olympiads in the Kyrgyz SSR and it attracted people from various age groups and nationalities. On the other hand, the event failed to accommodate all the delegates equally and had limited success in introducing new art forms, such as theater, that the Bolsheviks believed were essential for revolutionary education. The Central Asians were slow to take on theater; this Olympiad, for example, included only one theater troupe. In this report, regional leadership signaled to the higher authorities in Frunze that there was a lot to be accomplished that would require more financial support from the regional or central authorities.

At the end of the 1930s celebrations, masters of indigenous arts and crafts did not abandon their creative work for “Western” art forms. Newspaper descriptions of national Olympiads indicated that events like these reserved an exceptional place for traditional arts, perhaps because mastery in these events provoked greater awe among audiences. Spectators possessed more emotional attachment to their indigenous art and understood it well. In contrast, performances in Western-style art events such as plays mostly

generated curiosity among audiences, because both the artists and the spectators were novices. News reports and official documents about the Olympiads and other celebrations show that indigenous performances and exhibits took center stage. Thus people's interest in familiar arts, combined with the government's interest in elevating national cultures, contributed to an increasing emphasis on traditional arts.

In a series of interviews with veterans of Kyrgyz theater and higher education, it appears that many artists and educators appreciated that the Soviet state introduced Western art to Central Asia.⁴⁸ When I asked my subjects about the role of socialist themes in their arts, however, they often provided conflicting or ambiguous answers such as: "Kyrgyz are proud of their indigenous culture." Sometimes, they offered the official Soviet argument that Kyrgyz had "no civilized art forms until the Great October Revolution."⁴⁹ There are obvious limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from these interviews, which I conducted after the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Kyrgyz artists and educators I interviewed conveyed strong convictions that Soviet culture helped Kyrgyz shape their own culture in "the modern world:" they referred to the cultural and educational differences between their grandparents and themselves; they were grateful to be able to appreciate Western literature and arts; they proudly pointed out that "thanks to the Soviet education system" they were all bilingual or even trilingual. Their narrative of the Soviet past blended their own experiences with that of their

⁴⁸ Interviews with Kadyrkul Ismailov, the Manager of Naryn House of Culture, May 18, 2002, and Nurina Ömüraliyeva, an artist and a scholar of Kyrgyz Theater, June 17, 2002. Interviews with Professors Bübina Oruzbayeva, Diiishön Shamatov, and Gülnara Jamasheva, May 28, 2002.

⁴⁹ There is an extensive literature on learning to "speak Bolshevik." For discussions on the ways in which Soviet citizens learned to adopt the official Soviet line and fashioned socialist, class-based identities, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," and Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*.

grandparents (from the 1920s and 1930s) and parents (from the 1940s and later), so that their Kyrgyzness was unquestionably tied to that of their older relatives. When asked about their national identity, they seemed puzzled: their Kyrgyzness was not something they questioned. They invariably asserted that their modern Kyrgyzness emerged in the generation before them in the 1920s and the 1930s.

While conducting a personal tour of the Naryn Historical Museum, curator Raia Baetova informed me that “thanks to her Soviet education she was able to appreciate the historical and cultural evolution Kyrgyz people have achieved.” When I asked how she was first exposed to so-called “cultural evolution” of Kyrgyz, she responded that as a kindergarten student, she participated in school festivals and celebrations during which they acted out episodes of Kyrgyz history. Baetova also pointed out that her father poet Musa Baetov (1902-1949) who earned the title of People’s Artist, had the great opportunity to introduce his culture to the Soviet people because of Soviet advances in the arts.⁵⁰ Artists such as Baetov thus contributed to the discourse that attempted to find a comfortable compromise between national and socialist cultural expressions. In the 1930s, the state encouraged them to discover this place through public celebrations.

These interviews and anecdotes take us back to the childhoods of my subjects and their evaluations of their parents’ experiences in the 1930s. These brief episodes of oral histories also demonstrate that there is a direct link between clubs and celebrations. In 1933 and 1934, central and regional administrators and their club managers in ails of Kyrgyzstan began establishing public celebrations as tools of cultural development. At first, state policies on public celebrations were poorly defined and organized: the

⁵⁰ Raia Baetova, the curator of Naryn Historical Museum, July 12, 2002.

documents that described and regulated the celebrations were vague and laden with ideological language. Nonetheless, regional administrators and club managers in ails did the best they could with such meager regulations. Or, perhaps, they took advantage of the vagueness to make celebrations their own.

The reports and decrees show that ail populations were sometimes apathetic about cultural events such as theatrical performances that seemed foreign to them. Even if they were interested, the conditions in the clubs and other Houses of Culture made participation uncomfortable for both the actors and the audiences. They were more receptive towards cultural events that were grounded on their ail traditions. Even if the regional administrators expressed their frustration, they took notice of how ail populations responded to their cultural policies. They had to pay attention to ail culture if they were to promote the development of the individual nationality.⁵¹ The Olympiads, dekady and other nationally-inspired celebrations demonstrate that Stalin Era administrators needed to acknowledge the importance of national musical instruments, for example, in celebrating the Soviet *narod* (folk) which included the Kyrgyz nation.

These reports and decrees also demonstrate that while central authorities sent out directives, demanding adherence to the Party's ideological objectives, regional event organizers responded that regional needs and conditions limited their achievements. Kyrgyz leadership in clubs attempted to assert that their artists could participate successfully if they stayed close to their cultural roots by putting on shows with indigenous artistic means. Furthermore, Kyrgyz event organizers such as club managers

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion on the ways in which the state promoted national cultures during celebrations see Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*.

indicated that persistent lack of resources prevented them from expanding western-oriented art forms such as theater. They left out of their reports that there might have been alternative explanations for their failures, such as apathy, indifference, or even hostility toward state imposition of Western-oriented arts and celebrations. Whatever the explanation might have been, Kyrgyz artists had a chance to showcase their indigenous art forms in Soviet celebrations. In the 1930s, the state-sponsored Kyrgyz-centric celebrations and regional preference for indigenous art forms fed each other. Ethnic elements that dominated the celebrations emerged as a response both to the Soviet state's ethnophilia and regional artistic tastes.

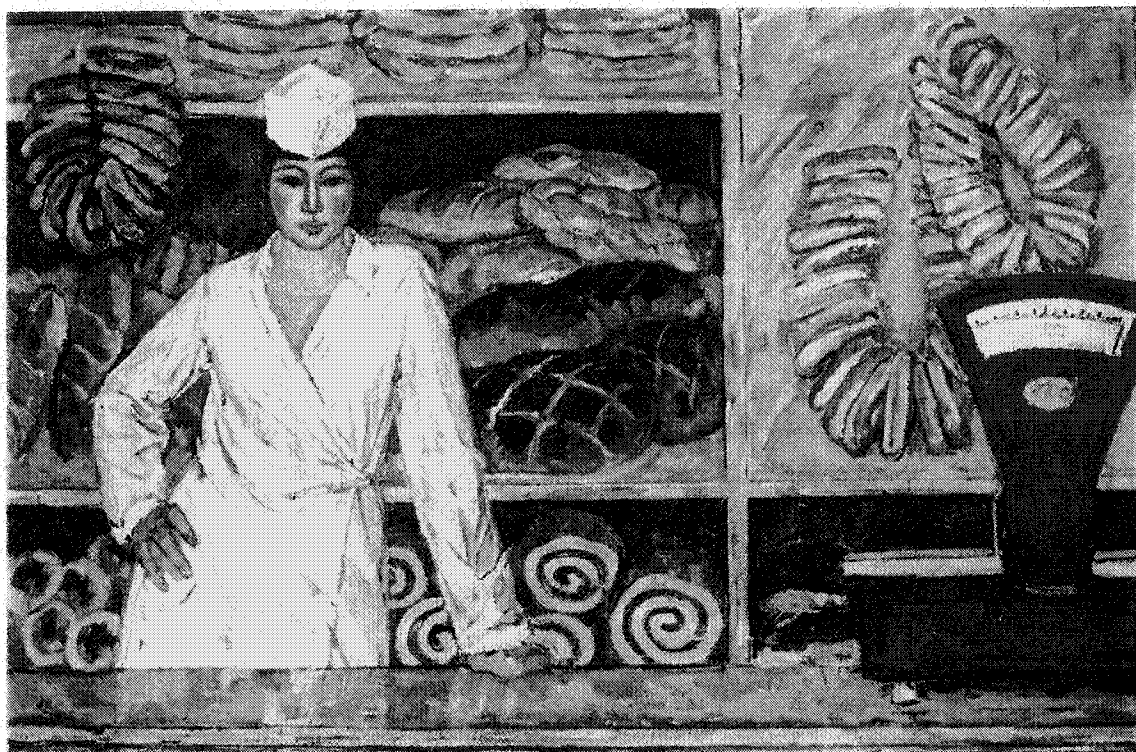


FIGURE 23: A. B. Osmonov painting, 1939, titled *Nan dükönündö (At the bakery)*, source: *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*.

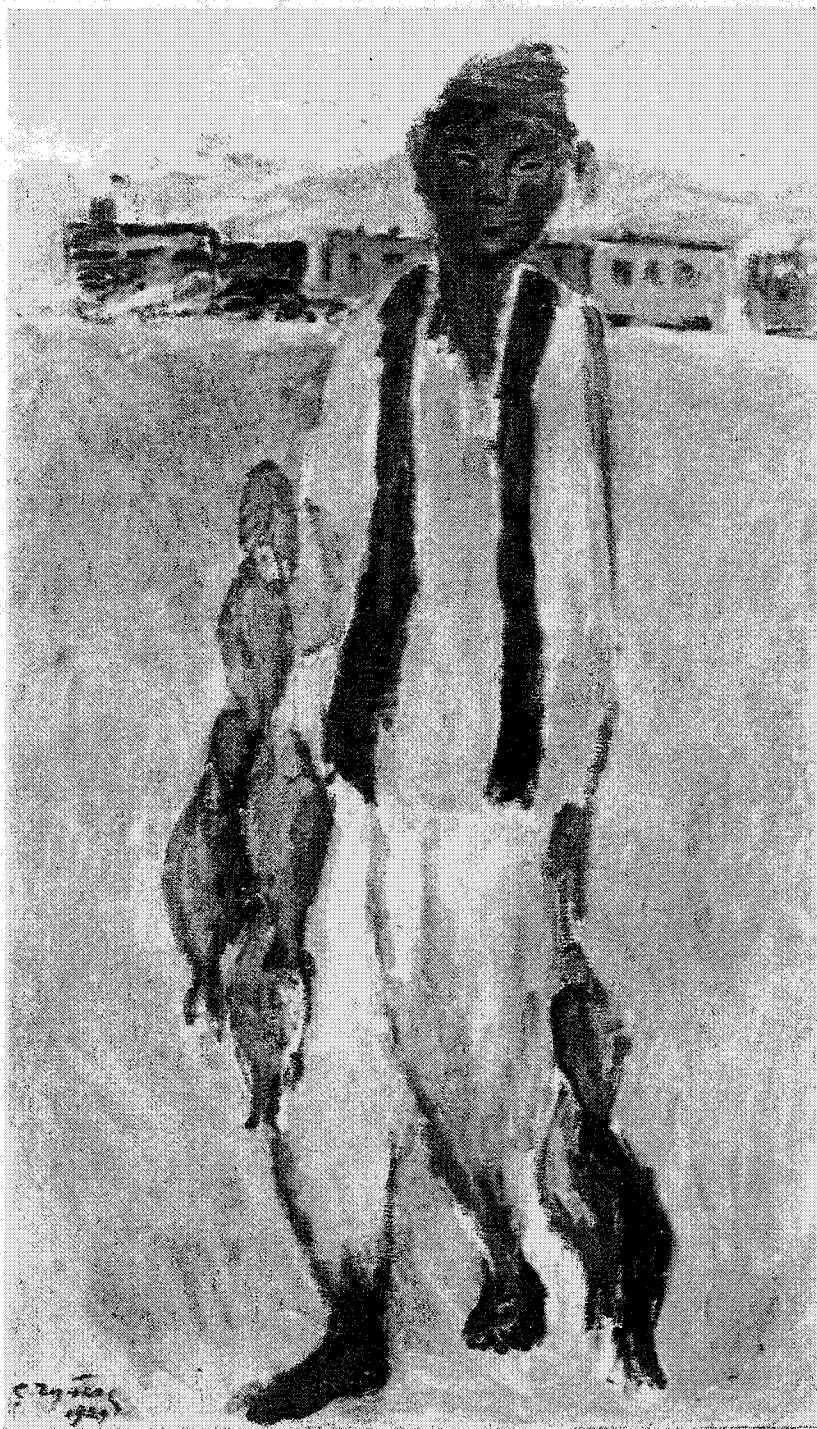


FIGURE 24: S. A. Chuikov painting, titled *Mal'chik s pyboi* (*Boy with fish*), 1929, source: Popova, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*.



FIGURE 25: A. A. Sgibnev lithograph, titled *Kara-Suiskii ugol'nii razrez* (*Kara Suu Coal Mine*), 1967, source: Popova, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOVIET THEATER IN KYRGYZSTAN IN THE 1930S

Theater provided a powerful arena for Kyrgyz revolutionaries of the 1930s to introduce Soviet ideology to wide populations in clubs and Houses of Culture. All types of Houses of Culture became the stages for the first plays in Kyrgyzstan. In 1919 the first People's Theater opened its doors in Karakol and presented their first stage production, Maxim Gorky's play *Na Dne or Underground*.

This chapter explores the development of Soviet theater, from modest performances that debuted in Soviet clubs in the 1920s, which exposed Kyrgyz youth to Soviet dramatic forms, and prepared them to undertake professional careers in the theater of the 1930s. It argues that few theater professionals managed to introduce Kyrgyzness into Soviet theater of the 1930s Kyrgyzstan. It posits that Kyrgyz theater professionals of the 1930s, who received their first theater education in clubs, participated in the process of conveying the Soviet state's ideological messages: these revolutionary figures in the cultural arena helped to add a traditional exterior to the Soviet ideological message, by using stage sets depicting *jailoo* (summer pasture of nomadic populations in the high mountains) scenes and stage costumes representing nomadic traditions. Consequently, the chapter suggests, that Kyrgyz revolutionaries and the first generation of Kyrgyz theater professionals managed to shape the Kyrgyz National Theater in a national image

suited to Soviet ideology. The state theater and its creative crew could have not existed without the Houses of Culture.¹

There was a dark side to the emergence of Kyrgyz theater, however. Financial challenges of the late 1930s handicapped most of the cultural projects, but these were not the only government ventures to suffer. The economic climate of the Soviet Union between 1937 and the Second World War was drastically different from that of the first part of the decade.² Stalin's purges stripped many management positions of their experienced leaders and related labor and wage problems loomed large in Kyrgyzstan. The purges targeted many intellectuals in the Soviet Union and Kyrgyzstan was not spared. In November 1938, Ivan Petrovich Lotsmanov, the head of the Kyrgyz People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), ordered the execution of 137 "enemies of the people." On November 5, 1938, these people were shot and thrown into the heater of a brick factory near Chong Tash, not far from Frunze.³ Among them were many

¹ This chapter discusses the development of this process, while Chapter Six on women brings in particular experiences of several female theater professionals from the 1930s.

² The Kyrgyz drew lower salaries, working in neglected social and cultural fields. Between 1929 and 1933, the industrial expansion of the Soviet Union resulted in rapid economic development. But along with the expansion came major labor, commodity and food shortages, and wages and living standards declined. Shock-work was the game of the day. For more details see, Lubin, *Labour and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia: An Uneasy Compromise*, 77-78. Between 1934 and 1936, the economic climate settled down a bit: productivity, wages and the standard of living improved. Stakhanovism replaced shock-work. Between 1937 and the War, the economy again slowed down, and employment and the standard of living declined. For more on shock-work see Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932*. The economic conditions of the latter years of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s did not allow the government to finance many cultural projects. Barber, "The Development of Soviet Employment and Labour Policy, 1930-41," 50-82.

³ "To the Head of the Prison of the State Department of Security of the NKVD of the Kyrgyz SSR, 8 November 1938, Order No: 81

'I order you to execute the Resolution of the NKVD and the Procurator of the USSR and the Special Triumvirate of NKVD of the Kyrgyz SSR under the protocols No: 211, 16, 20, 26 and 30, and to condemn the execution of (those) in the list below:'

(137 names)

Colonel I. P. Lotsmanov, the Head of the NKVD of the Kyrgyz SSR." In Khelimskaia, *Taina Chong-Tasha*, 144.

intellectuals such as Kasym Tynystanov, Chingiz Aitmatov's father Törökul Aitmatov, and Jusup Abdrakhmanov.⁴ Tynystanov was one of the founders of the communist party in Kyrgyzstan. Ironically, these native sons of Kyrgyzstan were accused of being the "enemies of the people" by a Belorussian colonel who had just arrived in Kyrgyzstan.⁵ Stalin's purges managed to eliminate these 137 academics, writers, politicians, and other progressive people in Kyrgyzstan. Once favorite sons of the revolution, they were nonetheless murdered for alleged anti-Soviet activity.

In the brutal era from 1933 to the end of the WWII, Stalin and his commissars purged those of the Kyrgyz Soviet elite who believed that valuing their Kyrgyz community was not necessarily an impediment to their Soviet citizenship.⁶ Those who survived the purges experienced tremendous hardship and paid their dues in other ways: following the purges, Russians and other European workers and administrators dominated the labor force and government jobs, including those in theater, isolating the Kyrgyz and other Central Asians in less lucrative jobs such as service, traditional trades, and agriculture.

This chapter focuses on the making of those few Kyrgyz theater professionals who survived and kept their positions through the purges. Once again, this chapter uses

⁴ Tynystanov adapted the Latin alphabet for use in Kyrgyz and founded the first Kyrgyz newspaper, *Erkin Too*. Like Tynystanov, Aitmatov and Abdrakhmanov served their country either politically or intellectually. Some worked as party members and administrators while others wrote manuals, pamphlets and books to help establish socialism in Kyrgyzstan.

⁵ "*Sud'ba Placha: Ivan Petrovich Lotsmanov.*" In May 1937, Nikolai Iezhov, the head of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) recommended Ivan Lotsmanov to the Department of Frontier armies in Alma-Ata. By September, Lotsmanov was already the head of the NKVD in Kirghizia. By winter, the colonel Lotsmanov was selected as a Deputy of the Supreme Council of the USSR. Ivan Lotsmanov, 34 years old, wearing Iezhov's robe began to arrange the "order." He first ordered the execution of his predecessor Chetvertakov. His typical accusation relied loosely on counter-revolutionary activities of "the enemies of the people." Lotsmanov's administration repressed about 10,000 people.

⁶ Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Frustration," 401.

club correspondence as its primary source of information and evidence. It examines the official reports on Kyrgyz theater events, occasionally called Theater Olympiads. It analyzes the language of these reports in order to explain how these few theater professionals managed to insert Kyrgyz flavor into Soviet theater of the 1930s Kyrgyzstan.

When the Party carved the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Republic into smaller republics in 1924, the cultural and political reeducation of Kyrgyz was well underway. Three years earlier, on June 21, 1921, the Turkestan National Commissariat of Education had declared in a key resolution that the “already existing creativity” of the peoples of Turkestan needed to be raised to the new Soviet standards. According to this resolution, the arts of the Kyrgyz “working population,” such as epic storytelling, carpet weaving, and ceramics should adhere to the new standards.⁷

The resolution listed several vague standards that included the following: work should emphasize the plight of working people in the hands of ail leaders; it should highlight national traditions; and it should point out the importance of the Bolshevik Revolution and socialist ideals.⁸ Not only schools, but also clubs would be responsible for carrying out cultural activities in accordance with these new standards. This resolution used the phrase “revolutionizing all forms of art” and assigned responsibility for conveying socialist ideals to the masses to clubs. An important case in point was the requirement that the highly revered traditional *Manas* epic be performed on a popular

⁷ “The Resolution Theses of Congress of the Managers of the National Education Departments of Turkestan Republic,” June 21, 1921, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 1, d. 1417, ll. 70-72.

⁸ Ibid.

theater stage rather than at outdoor gatherings.⁹ This was the first step the state's gradual appropriation of *Manas* as a narrative representation of socialist heroism, because the legend of *Manas* told the story of a people who fought foreign enemies and oppressive leaders.

The resolution mirrored the ambiguity of 1930s Soviet policies regarding the relationship between education and entertainment of non-Russians in Central Asia. When determining the role of club theaters as a means of education, both the state and non-Russians were unclear about the meaning of so-called revolutionary standards. The policy was not only ambiguous, but incompatible with all traditions. Several fundamental contradictions between Central Asian and European (Slavic, German and others) culture rendered policy-making a balancing act. Central Asian people had experienced and incorporated outside cultural trends for centuries. In fact, Persian, Mongolian, Turkic, and Chinese artistic influences made Central Asian art what it was before the Europeans (Russians, Ukrainians, ethnic Germans and others) arrived. Moreover, cultural differences between European populations and Central Asians, which had been shaped by religion, language, class structures, gender and familial traditions, and nomadism, proved to be difficult for regional and all administrators to overcome. Like Central Asians, however, Russian, Ukrainian, and other European peasant populations experienced theater for the first time in clubs, so that, theater, as a new and dynamic art form, was expected to close the cultural gap between these diverse populations.

⁹ See *Manas* as an opera (Figure 26) on page 218.

Since late nineteenth century, the peoples of Central Asia experienced the influence of cultural trends from the West.¹⁰ On the one hand, these experiences were more influential among sedentary and urbanized societies such as the Tajiks and Uzbeks; on the other hand, some of the urbanized societies were more closely tied to Islamic traditions than were nomadic populations. In urban centers such as Tashkent and Bishkek, Slavic cultural influences such as Western-style architecture, arts, literature, and clothing, had made their mark during the Russian Imperial occupation. This continued after the Bolshevik Revolution, as the new Marxist and Leninist state demanded more rapid social and cultural development. Soviet clubs were more mobile, requiring only a room or a *bozūi*, and were thus more successful tools of cultural dissemination among nomads. When clubs came into being during the late 1920s and early 1930s, they represented one of the institutions of so-called cultural development in the Soviet Union. According to the official rhetoric, club theaters represented “culturedness.”

All Clubs as the First Hosts of Kyrgyz Theater

The predecessor of Soviet clubs and other Houses of Culture, *Narodnyi dom* (or People’s House) of 1880s Russia, did not reach ordinary people, but only provided a locale of leisure for intellectuals and the elites of the time. A theater rather than an art exhibit or a crafts room had a prominent place in these houses of leisure. Later in the century, more unassuming versions of these houses opened up in working class neighborhoods in Russia. These People’s Houses became models for the Soviet Houses of Culture, particularly in that they always included a space for popular theater. Old

¹⁰ The West, in this context, means the peoples Persia, Arabia, Anatolia, and Europe.

Russian bourgeois tearooms and reading rooms became Red Teahouses among Uzbeks and Red Yurts among Kyrgyz, all of which included a small area for popular theater.¹¹

According to Kyrgyz writer Kasymaly Jantöshev (1904-1968), the first Kyrgyz language play was staged in 1920 in a small village called Cholpon near the city of Karakol. Written by an unidentified school teacher, this one-act play titled *Bukulbai* told the story of the struggle of a penniless peasant against the *bai* (a wealthy landowner) of the ail.¹² *Bukulbai* set a precedence that Kyrgyz plays should give voice to the suffering of poverty-stricken Kyrgyz herders.¹³ After this ground-breaking play, several village Soviet clubs in Kyzyl Kyia and Osh began staging one-act plays with subject matter that included women's liberation, cultural liberation from old norms, and the trials and tribulations of the working class against the bails.¹⁴

For the most part, teenage boys performed this artistic work in the late 1920s, playing all parts from wise aksakal or the elder to the oppressed young bride. Because of traditional restrictions on girls' participation in public activities, girls did not begin participating until the middle of the 1930s.¹⁵ When necessary, the boys wore beards made out of goat's hair, or donned their sisters' dresses. Later, these teenagers helped

¹¹ See Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 18. For pre-Soviet processors of Soviet clubs and theater see, Tikhvinskaia, *Kabare i teatry miniatur v Rossii*; Swift, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia*, Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater*; Leach and Borovsky, *A History of Russian Theatre*; McReynolds and Neuberger, *Imitations of Life*; and Thurston, *The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia*.

¹² Abdyldayev, *Kyrgyz Respublikasyndagy özdük körköm chygarmachylyk*, 20-35.

¹³ Lvov, *Kyrgyzkii Teatr*, 16.

¹⁴ Abdyldayev, *Kyrgyz Respublikasyndagy özdük körköm chygarmachylyk*, 112. For more on Jantoshev see Lvov, *Kyrgyzkii Teatr*; Brudnyi, *Iz Istorii Russko-Kirgizskoi Literaturnyh i Teatral'nyh Svyazei*; Osmanova, *Istoriya Kirgizskoi Sovetskoi Literatury* and Sadykov, *Kyrgyz Sovet Adabiyatynyn Taryhy*.

¹⁵ See Chapter Six for women's participation in theater.

establish the Frunze Kyrgyz Pedagogical Institute's Theater Branch. By so doing, they helped to shape the foundation of the Soviet performing arts, producing artists like composer Abdylas Maldybayev (1906-1978), the above-mentioned writer Jantöshev, and actress Anvar Kuttubayeva (1915-1977). These talented people partook in their first Western-style stage productions in their own ail clubs.¹⁶

Plays like *Bukulbai*, staged in clubs, became artistic vehicles for what these Soviet-educated theater professionals called cultural development. Prior to their education in Western performing arts, these theater figures' primary experience with entertainment had been celebratory games that took place during *tois* (family and community festivities such as birth and circumcision, celebrations, and weddings). These festivities included *köz tangmai* (a game similar to pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey), *tyiyn engmey* (a game played on horseback), *kyz oyunu* (a flirting ritual), *kyz kuumai* (catch the girl), *at küröshü* (wrestling on a horse-back), and various prayer rituals. Manaschy and akyn recitations were also essential components of these celebrations. Although these celebrations had elements that could be incorporated into theater, they did not resemble Western theater.

The development of the Kyrgyz National Theater in many ways mirrored the creation of the Republic's government apparatus. Slavic and other outsiders to the region created the Communist Party of Kyrgyz SSR and ran it until the *korenizatsiia* policy took

¹⁶ A. Maldybaev, K. Jantöshev and A. Kuttubaeva were among the founders of the Kyrgyz cultural institutions in the Soviet Union. For their artistic accomplishments and contributions see Lvov, *Kyrgyzkii Teatr*, Brudnyi, *Iz Istorii Russko-Kirgizskoi Literaturnyh i Teatral'nyh Svyazei*, Osmanova, *Istoriya Kirgizskoi Sovetskoi Literatury*, and Sadykov, *Kyrgyz Sovet Adabiyatynyn Taryhy*.

effect in 1934.¹⁷ The managers of all cultural institutions in the 1920s, not unlike those of the regional communist party, were Russian, German, Jewish, Tatar — in other words, nationalities other than Kyrgyz. In the eyes of these outsiders, Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations were incapable of running government offices, including cultural institutions, because they were illiterate and consequently, ignorant. For a decade, in all upper levels of the government the decision-making processes rarely included the Kyrgyz. The central party, for example, did not allow Kyrgyz members to participate fully as politicians. Non-Kyrgyz leadership often accused Kyrgyz of adhering to traditional norms by continuing to protect their clan and tribe members. In turn, Kyrgyz often complained about the exclusive use of Russian language in official matters. Eventually, their complaints were heard: a 1924 Soviet law ordered all government documentation to be translated into Kyrgyz.¹⁸

The year of 1926 marked the official beginning of the Kyrgyz National Theater. All the original directors were non-Kyrgyz: N. Yelenin, D. Matsunin, and A.G. Poselyanin. Among the first group of actors, however, Kyrgyz talents were well represented by Amankul Kuttubayev (1907-1984), Abygadyr Aybashev (1907-1965), Kanymkül Aybasheva (1901-1940), and Bübüsara Beishenaliyeva (1926-1973).¹⁹ On March 18, 1926, the studio sent many of these young actors to Moscow to be trained in the studios of the famous Soviet director and teacher I.S. Stanislavsky. Inspired by the

¹⁷ Nahaylo, and Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR*, and Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* 7-10.

¹⁸ The government continued to regard the traditional ways as intolerable 'tribalism' and 'nepotism'. It purged or exiled many of the Kyrgyz members who spoke up even before Stalin's notorious purges began in the mid 1930s. Karakeev, *Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSR*, vol. 3, 319-337.

¹⁹ See Bübüsara Beishenaliyeva (Figure 27) on page 219.

professional associations that they had made during their frequent trips to Moscow and also by the training they received there, these indigenous talents managed to help the creation of the Kyrgyz State Theater. With the premiere of playwright Kasymaly Jantöshev's play *Alim and Mariya* (1928), the first theater of Kyrgyzstan began its history on the night of November 7, 1930.²⁰

Theater, ballet, and opera exposed Kyrgyz to western artistic expression and attempted to create a fusion of indigenous culture and western artistic tradition. In their rhetoric, ail club documents advocated such fusion. This language of a merger of indigenous and Western arts survived for many years. Twenty years later, popular fiction of the late 1950s reflected upon such an imagined fusion, invoking a nostalgic past that established a romantic image of such cultured times. Ilias, the anti-hero of Aitmatov's novella *My Poplar in the Red Scarf*, expressed his admiration for a cultural event even though it took place miles away from his ail:

I pulled out the only valuable thing I owned, my radio. I found the station I wanted right away. I remember it as if it happened only yesterday. They were broadcasting the ballet *Cholpon* from the theater at the capital. The music that reached my radio over the mountain ranges filled my truck. This music was as sweet and powerful as the love story the ballet dances created. When the music stopped, the walls of the dance hall vibrated with applause, the spectators yelled out the names of the dancers, and maybe threw flowers at the feet of the ballerinas. But, I am sure that none of them felt the joy and the thrill that the ballet gave me in a coal hauler's truck, sitting on the shore of the stormy Ysyk Köl.²¹

Aitmatov constructed an unlikely image of a truck driver romancing his girlfriend with ballet music, an image that was meant to give several messages. Aitmatov suggested that

²⁰ Syrymbetov, *Örkönü Öskön Madaniyat*, 14-6.

²¹ Aitmatov, *Kyzyl Jooluk Jaljalym* (first published in 1959 with the title *Dolondun kan jolunda*), 30.

the high culture of the West (like the ballet) reached out to the hard-working people in the smallest Kyrgyz ails and these rural people responded to it. Aitmatov's narrative had a distinctly Kyrgyz flavor that made Ilias's admiration of the music believable and so the story, which at first seems unlikely, succeeded. The ballet *Cholpon* is based on an authentic Kyrgyz story, which is similar to Aitmatov's story of Ilias and Asel. Standing up to the traditional tyrannies of arranged marriage appealed not only to Ilias, but also to the impressionable young readers of the story, making *My Poplar in the Red Scarf* a national (and international) success.²² Aitmatov provided young Kyrgyz people with a powerful story of liberation from the old ways, wrapped in a Western artistic form.

Like fictional Ilias, young Kyrgyz people such as teachers and Komsomol members were first exposed to and began to participate in western performing arts in clubs. Ail teachers, Komsomol members and other Party members cooperated in organizing theaters in their districts. Many clubs, *Zhenotdel*, Red Yurts, Red Choikhonas, and Kolkhozes began to stage shows. In 1922, the Komsomol members of the Kyzyl Kyia coal mine organized several events in their Coalminers' Club. They knew little about theater, and learned all they could from traveling Ukrainian Theater Troupes. Ail youth who attended university in Tashkent also brought back some information on theater. These were only two of the few early stages towards building a national theater in Kyrgyzstan.

²²The universal value of this story became apparent when a Turkish motion picture titled *Selvi Boylum, Al Yazmalım* (1977) based on the book turned out to be a popular movie classic. It still appears in international film festivals around the world (Seattle International Film Festival, 2002). Atif Yılmaz directed the film, which featured two of the stars of Turkish cinema, Kadir İnanır (as Ilias or Ilyas) and Türkan Şoray (as Asya—the Turkish version of Asel).

In the late 1920s, theater emerged in Kyrgyzstan as one of the most practical art forms to entertain and educate large populations. The Kyrgyz National Drama Studio presented most of this work to the people in ails. In the eyes of the ail populations, to whom club theaters were novel, the first students of the studio became the representatives of cultural development. The Kyrgyz National Drama Studio was created by 20 people in 1926. In the 1927-28 academic year, the studio introduced plastic arts, dance, and piano, and created a Great Russian Orchestra. The studio took all the plays to the southern oblasts, and experienced great success among a large number of workers. In 1928 and 1929, the studio dedicated itself to building on and accelerating the successes of the previous years and began the preparations for a wide-ranging drama repertoire and for the creation of a national theater. The central workers' club in Frunze organized and housed several plays. According to the organizers, these plays demonstrated that there were highly talented artists studying at the studio who would be able to compose the core of the future national theater. A 1929 report proudly stated that the students staged the plays *Revizor* (Inspector) and *Miatezh* (Revolt) without needing a prompter. The discourse of so-called cultural development of the participants, an ethnically and economically diverse group, comes across clearly in the report:

Forty students: 29 men and eleven women, 28 Kyrgyz men and nine Kyrgyz women, and three Kazakhs. The class composition of the students: 13 farmhands, ten poor Asiatic peasants, 15 Asiatic peasants and two others. The Party membership of the students: one female member of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks, one candidate of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks, 31 members (28 men and three women) of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (VLKSM), and seven non-Party members (two men and five women) Note: There is one Tatar student who is a daughter of a manap, and another who is a daughter of a mullah.

Speaking about the achievements of the studio, the report argued that “one cannot fail but notice the positive results,” and proudly announced that “successes were transferred to the masses.” One of the success stories involved a break with the feudal past --the language of this report indicated that the participation of daughters of manaps and mullahs was a symbol of success. The report also applauded the achievement of organizing two amateur circles, one choral and one dramaturgical. It revealed that not only civilians but Red Army soldiers of the national battalion were involved in establishing theater in ails. The Red Army circle was to begin rehearsals to stage a play and a concert under the direction of the students of the studio. The report claimed that the work of the students “clearly shows that the students are not only limited to acting, but are also educators of the new Soviet actors/public workers.” The students of the studio, all members of the Union of Art Workers and cooperatives, were loaned to several factories as trainers. The report summarized that the students were “*exemplary* union workers who brought *European* art to the workers.”²³ Finally, this report indicated that theater activities of clubs and drama circles and studios prepared a handful of professionals to train and encourage other theater enthusiasts. The official discourse suggested that these newly trained actors took on “the difficult task of educating the masses.” In other words, they learned to speak the language of the state: appropriately trained indigenous entertainers would provide political education that encouraged multi-nationalism.

²³ “The Report of the Central Political Education Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic about the work of the Kyrgyz National Drama Studio, and its activities during 1929 and early 1930,” March 31, 1929, TsGAKSSR, f. 1688, op. 286, d.2, ll. 75-81.

In the 1930s, both amateur and professional theater troupes in Kyrgyzstan participated in various celebrations, often taking center stage. The Kyrgyz Party expected the House of National Creativity to take charge of theatrical development in the republic, so the Kyrgyz State National Theater needed trained actors drawn from clubs in many regions of the country. The House of National Creativity was supposed to discover the talent in small drama circles of ail clubs.

The Kyrgyz Communist Party passed a resolution in 1936 ordering the National Theater to accelerate its growth and development. The October 7, 1936 resolution criticized the directors of the theater for lagging behind in their development of new and exciting repertoire. The resolution remarked that there had been only two ideologically appropriate plays to put on the stage: Jusup Turusbekov's *Ajal Orduna* (1935) and Kasymaly Jantöshev's *Karachach* (1928). It demanded that "music and dance in the best Kyrgyz tradition" must be included in future performances.²⁴ The resolution laid out two mandatory conditions for success of the theater: it had to learn to harvest materials from national creativity, and it had to develop its theatrical tradition modeled on the best theaters such as the Maxim Gorky Moscow Art Theater. Furthermore, the resolution ordered the theater to invite "a qualified linguist" to train the actors to speak "correctly in the literary Kyrgyz language and purge all the dialects from it." This resolution was essentially asking the actors to learn to be Soviet artists, based on the Russian artistic tradition, but also to blend in their own cultural traditions. Nevertheless, there was a

²⁴ "The Resolution of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks on Furthering the Development of the Kyrgyz State Theater," October 7, 1936, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 10, op. 1, d. 1067, ll. 109-111.

cultural hierarchy at play. Russian artistic traditions were the means through which the Kyrgyz “national character” was to be conveyed.

A 1938 party decree indicated that the House did not do well in organizing theater activities.²⁵ The decree dictated party requirements for the House and other institutions of culture. Mainly, the Party requested establishment of the “First All Kyrgyz Olympiad of Kolkhoz, Sovkhoz, and Machine Tractor Station (MTS) members” in Frunze. The event was to take place July 20 to 25, 1939 and its purpose was to discover talented artists who would be educated in the capital. First, a commission consisting of between three to five people, representing all the raion and oblast populations, would register all talented people. In order to expedite the registration, the commission was to announce the objectives of the Olympiad in print media and on the radio in order to reach as many people as possible in the most remote areas of Kyrgyzstan. The Department of Artistic Affairs (Comrade Klikh), the Central Committee of Lenin Committee of Komsomol of Kirghizia (Comrade Birukov), and the House of National Creativity were put to work unearthing hidden performing-art talents, including akyns, manaschys, komuz players and national dancers, who performed as attractions in addition to plays.

The 1938 decree demonstrated that theater activity in the ails was still fairly basic and therefore a scouring search for Kyrgyz talent was necessary. Most amateurs performed on Kyrgyz instruments and sang Kyrgyz songs. The plays in the ails were limited, both in repertoire and talent. The Olympiad needed to include at least two state or kolkhoz theaters and 150 amateur performers. Just as the Kyrgyz people were having

²⁵ “The Decree of the Bureau of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia on the Organization of All Kyrgyz Olympiad and Republican Celebration of Collective Farm Theaters,” August 28, 1938, TsGAKSSR, f.1603, op.10, d.4, l.19.

difficulty being kolkhozniks, the performers among them were having difficulty performing as members of a theater troupe. If they could have a choice, many Kyrgyz would have chosen less-regimented performances outside the ails, like the improvised performances of their story-tellers, but this would have been unacceptable to the Party, who pressed for more organized cultural gatherings like Theater Olympiads.

The results of the Theater Olympiad (July 20-25, 1939) were surprising. There were more troupes with enthusiastic actors than expected and the performances tended to be ethnically oriented. Four Kyrgyz, one Uzbek, and one Russian theater troupe participated, and 136 individuals performed. The Kyrgyz troupes from Jumgal, Özgön, Chui, and Przheval'sk (Karakol) performed plays written by Kyrgyz playwrights (*Dardal* by Jantöshev, *Kakei* by Tokobayev, and *Toktogul* by Bökönbaev). The Uzbek troupe from Jalal Abad staged an Uzbek play and the Russian Theater from Stalin Oblast staged a Russian play.²⁶

Concerts were interspersed with the plays. Although details of the concerts are few, some evidence indicates that these were ethnic music performances.²⁷ Comrade Klikh, the organizer of the event, complained about the lack of professionalism and education these theater troupes demonstrated during the concerts. He declared that these "young theaters" should be better organized to evolve into more professional theaters. Klikh's report reflected the excitement that some of the theater enthusiasts must have experienced. The report argued that the celebration had enabled young actors to exchange creative ideas. For the first time, actors could consult with and learn from

²⁶ "The Outcome of the Republican Celebration of the Kolkhoz Theaters of the Kyrgyz SSR," August 1, 1939, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 29.

²⁷ Ibid. The second item in the report lists the *komuzchus*, *manaschys*, and national singers as main events.

masters of the field. There is no doubt that a budding actor from a kolkhoz in Özgön must have been star-struck in the capital, Frunze.²⁸ In most cases, it was their first, if not their only, chance to perform in front of an urban audience and receive feedback from theater professionals. Comrade Klikh claimed that optimism born out of such an environment was only possible because of the Soviet system. The very system that brought such cultural disruption to the region also expanded the cultural horizons and opportunities of the young people. Actress Sabira Kümüshaliyeva expressed the overwhelming optimism among young actors and actresses of her generation. Some of them were not only happy to leave their “backwards” ails, but also ecstatic about the opportunities in the capital.²⁹

Soviet arts and sciences also provided educational opportunities. Zamira Osmonbekova, a Kyrgyz physiotherapist, and Miyassar Razzakova, an Uzbek opera singer, reflected on the sentiments of optimistic Kyrgyz and Uzbek generations that preceded theirs. Osmonbekova, in an interview conducted in the late 1980s, noted:

If a Kyrgyz girl wanted to study in Moscow, she was welcome and all her expenses were covered. There was no discrimination on the basis of nationality. On its own, Kyrgyzstan or even Uzbekistan would never have been able to achieve such a standard of educations and could not have created the type of educational system that was created by the Soviet Union, thanks to the revolutions and socialism.³⁰

Soviet Kyrgyz arts are the product of a successful apprenticeship under Russian masters.³¹

²⁸ Özgön is located about seventeen hours southwest of Bishkek by car (in today's road conditions).

²⁹ Interview with Sabira Kümüshaliyeva, July 19, 2002.

³⁰ See a collection of interviews with Central Asian women in Tokhtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova, *The Daughters of Amazons*, 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

Osmonbekova's narrative demonstrates the power of Soviet ideology. Osmonbekova does not mention that only a handful of Central Asian actors managed to become successful professionals in Moscow or Leningrad. This fact, however, does not detract from her optimistic view of the past. Razzakova echoed Osmonbekova's sentiment and also reminisced about their parents' opportunities:

I consider Halima Nasirova, Nazira Akhmedova, and Saodat Kabulova to be leading performers; women who, with equal adroitness, took to their listeners the musical masterpieces of the East and the West. The immense delight which their art gave has made them legends in the memories of my parents' generation.³²

There were, however, many hurdles on the way to the educational and artistic successes of the 1930s about which the later generations spoke. Many reports regretted the lack of theater education, transportation, and most of all, funds.³³ In 1939, Kyrgyzstan had twelve kolkhoz theaters (eight Kyrgyz, three Russian and one Uzbek) with 225 actors. There were a few classes for these actors on acting methods, diction, and music, but the actors also spent many valuable hours studying mandatory topics such as the politics, history, and geography of the USSR. Moreover, the administrators remarked on the "weak and primitive" dramatic content of the plays and recommended that this problem could only be remedied with competitions and other events like

³² Ibid., 111.

³³ "The Resolution of the Kyrgyz Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks on Furthering the Development of the Kyrgyz State Theater," October, 7, 1936, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 10, op. 1, d. 1067, ll. 109-111; and "The Report of the Department of Artistic Affairs at the Council of National Commissars of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, addressed to the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the Network and Activity of The Theatrical Establishments of the Republic," October 1, 1938, TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 1, d. 815, ll. 5-12.

celebrations.³⁴ They also called for the translation of classical and modern plays and acting manuals into the Kyrgyz language.

Similarly, several reports expressed the frustrations of both the organizers and the participants with the Theater Olympiads.³⁵ There was, they agreed, much talent but little money for improvement. Kolkhoz actors had difficulty putting their newly gained artistic knowledge to use because they had no transportation to their performance venues. Most of the time, actors were not able to reach remote kolkhoz clubs, like those in the mountainous ails, to stage their plays. Harsh winters and poor road conditions often prohibited the actors from going to even the closest locations. As many as six oblasts did not have reliable transportation. The actors were resourceful, however: they carried their stage sets and costumes or borrowed materials for them wherever they went, or even worse, they performed in their everyday clothes.³⁶

Redeeming Factors and Overcoming Difficulties

Theater troupes devised strategies to lessen the negative impact of their financial problems and lack of resources. First, they focused on increasing the size of their audiences by reaching out to potential theater-goers both physically and emotionally. In addition to relying on their own resources (transportation, costumes, and stage sets) to put on a show, they tried to appeal to the tastes of ail audiences by staging plays that incorporated Kyrgyz or Uzbek themes. Before and after their performances, these

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "The Outcome of the Republican Celebration of the Kolkhoz Theaters of the Kyrgyz SSR," August 1, 1939, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 29.

troupes made the effort to connect with ail populations by attending their gatherings and donating their time and limited resources to regional causes.

Discourse in official correspondence indicated that the support of ail communities in the form of paying customers increased. This official rhetoric, typical of the language in the documents, claimed without any evidence that the troupes were physically and ideologically reaching their audiences. A 1930 report of the Osh Okrug Trade Union Bureau on the activities of the "Workers Theater" touted that during its tour in Southern Kyrgyzstan, the theater troupe succeeded in connecting with the audience.³⁷ The authors of the report proudly noted that during its 23 performances, the Workers Theater managed to draw paying customers from workers organizations in the ail. The troupe staged several plays at the Club of Builders, the Trade Union of the Soviet Servicemen, the Club of Agricultural and Wood Workers and the House of Recreation. The Okrug report emphasized that a 9,500-strong audience attended two free plays and commended the troupe for putting on plays that appealed to a wide range of workers while donating fifty rubles of the proceeds to the ail children's playground. The rhetoric of the report indicated that the troupe did not only entertain but also "set an example of good citizenship."

The second way troupes tried to overcome their difficulties was to please ail administrators with their performances. After all, they could not have survived without the affirmation and support of club managers and other leaders. They had to set the appropriate mood in their performances by conveying official ideology within a locally

³⁷ "The Resolution of Extended Session of the Osh Okrug Trade Union Bureau on the activities of the Workers' Theater in Southern Kirghizia," June 10, 1930, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 1, d. 385, l. 1.

recognized framework. In other words, a play about a shepherd becoming a Stakhanovite would please both ail populations and official constituencies. It would generate national and ail pride and it would highlight the benefits of the new system in the pasture. A successful production of a play was supposed “to set the appropriate mood” at a kolkhoz club or a trade union hall.³⁸

Ail reports reflected an air of pride and approval of the theater troupes, but also made suggestions for improvement. Official reports conveyed the demands of ail administrators: to educate while entertaining.³⁹ The Okrug report revealed that the leaders of the Trade Union in Osh believed that theater at the smallest worker unit was an important tool of entertainment and education. Phrases such as “the repertoire of ideological content,” “serving the basic needs of workers,” “training the youth,” and “setting the appropriate mood” clearly indicate the Trade Union Bureau’s intent.⁴⁰ To accomplish this, troupes needed to provide additional services for their audiences in small ails, because ail kolkhoz theaters were in desperate need of guidance and supplies. Osh administrators asked the troupe to “send a few members to okrug clubs to train the ail youth” and prepare them for coming celebrations and other cultural events.

Reflecting their concern about education, Osh administrators recommended that the troupe include plays that reflected on the actual lives of the “working youth,” the Red Soldiers, and the Komsomol. Interestingly, plays containing traditional (like *Manas* or *Mullah Nasreddin*) themes were not deemed sufficient to educate people. The official discourse was that plays focusing on the *Manas* excessively depended on the past.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Similarly, in addition to being a product of the past, Mullah Nasreddin was not a universal Soviet character.⁴¹ He was seen as too Asian, with ties to the Middle East and Muslim societies. He also frequently made fun of Russians. In order to diversify education, the okrug report asked that the troupe improve its repertoire by adding “classical” plays.⁴² Even though this particular report did not specify what it meant by “classical,” it is safe to assume that it referred to classical Western European and Russian plays that the commissars of enlightenment allowed at the time.

Such requests necessitated significant sacrifices on the part of actors. Educating the ail actors in Osh required a full-time commitment from performers in the workers’ theater of Frunze. No actor could commute to Osh okrug on a regular basis, which was at least a fifteen-hour ride on treacherous mountainous roads. He or she would have to take temporary residence in Osh. As Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva’s account demonstrated (see the last section of this chapter), actors occasionally did sacrifice their urban comforts for such noble service. As Kümüşhaliyeva explained, many of her fellow actors believed that they returned to their roots and gave back to their society when they served outside of Frunze.⁴³ The actors saw themselves as intellectual elites who belonged to ail tribes and clans. This attitude did not necessarily signal blindly believing in the Soviet rhetoric of “brotherhood.” Pragmatically, they retained old allegiances by serving their communities as Soviet intellectuals.

⁴¹ Mullah Nasreddin (Khodja Nasriddin or Nasraddin Afandi) is a fictional character that appears in folktales in most Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures. He is a wise-cracking Muslim cleric who gleefully breaks many of society’s rules. It is believed that he was born in the thirteenth century, during the Seljuk Era in Central Anatolia. For more on Khodja, see Boratav, *Nasreddin Hoca*, Başgöz, “Nasreddin Hoca Hikayeleri,” Shah, *The World of Nasrudin*, and Zakirov, *Kulinarnye sekrety Khodzhi Nasreddina*.

⁴²“The Resolution of Extended Session of the Osh Okrug Trade Union Bureau on the activities of the Workers’ Theater in Southern Kirghizia,” June, 10, 1930, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 1, d. 385, l. 1.

⁴³ Interview with Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, Bishkek, July 19, 2002.

Entertainment was to happen in club theaters within the confines of ideological agitation and propaganda. Some actors took this seriously, knew how to maneuver the system, and managed to forge careers for themselves. Some may have genuinely believed in the educational value of Westward-looking cultural development. These enthusiasts, believers in the state's cultural policies, rose to important posts in the arts. Kyrgyz newspapers after the 1930s were full of articles in which Kyrgyz theater figures declare their appreciation of the influence of Soviet theater education on their careers.⁴⁴ This is what Baken Kydykeieva, a well-known Kyrgyz stage actress, wrote about her 1937 experience with Stanislavskii, the legendary Russian theater teacher:

Once, I was hardly able to pronounce this long, beautiful, strong, and gentle sounding Russian name: Stanislavskii. It was when I was a fourteen-year old girl, [in 1937] who came to the stage of Child's Theater from a kolkhoz amateur performance. Since then, everything I did on the stage, rebellious Lawrence, Kyrgyz sorcerer Mastan, Shakespearian Desdemona, great Ostrovskii's Larissa, and Katherine, his name has stayed with me and with my comrades in creativity. His name propels us forward, to the top, to victories of creativity, and teaches us to overcome the bitterness of failure. Currently, my native Kyrgyz Drama Theatre is staging an immortal Shakespearian "King Lyre" dedicated to the honor the 100th anniversary of this great teacher. When our young director Dz. Abdykadyrov, Muratbek Ryskulov, our other comrades and I face a difficulty in creating the play, we always think about Konstantine Sergeevich Stanislavskii. He is as our father, who is alive and close to us and blesses of native people. (Baken Kydykeieva, National Actress of the Kyrgyz SSR.)

Aitmatov, too, acknowledged that Kyrgyz Theater would not have fully developed without the guidance and acknowledgement of the Russian and European traditions when

⁴⁴ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January 18, 1963, 3.

he noted that: “Muratbek Ryskulov (the Lenin Medal-winning Kyrgyz actor) managed to elevate Kyrgyz Theater to European levels.”⁴⁵

Kyrgyz artists molded themselves into Western forms, but their artistic achievements would have not been complete without the recognition of artistic masters and political leadership in Moscow or Leningrad. This was the main reason that film director Tölömüsh Okeyev (1936-2001) sang the praises of Chingiz Aitmatov, Muratbek Ryskulov (1909-1974), and Bübüsara Beishenaliyeva (the Lenin Medal-winning Kyrgyz ballerina—1926-1973) for introducing Kyrgyz culture and talent to Russians and Western Europeans:

Chingiz Aitmatov’s thriving works introduced the Kyrgyz lands and Kyrgyz people to the whole world. Bübüsara Beishenaliyeva’s personal gift in ballet and the talent of a Kyrgyz woman earned the admiration of the world. Muratbek Ryskulov’s voice that resembled the roar of a lion was heard on the stages of London, Paris and Moscow.⁴⁶

Despite the successes and sacrifices of the playwrights, actors, ballerinas, and other theater workers, the sorry state of all theaters was apparent. The kolkhoz theaters, which the regional administrators viewed as pivotal institutions for political and cultural education, were failing. They gathered all their resources to prepare for approaching celebrations such as the Olympiads. In a comprehensive report written on October 1, 1938, the Art Department of the Kyrgyz National Commissars (SNK of Kyrgyz SSR) reported to Moscow that Kyrgyz Kolkhoz Theaters had “no qualified actors, directors and

⁴⁵ See Muratbek Ryskulov (Figure 28) on page 220.

⁴⁶ See *Muratbek Ryskulov zamandashtarynyn eskerүүлöründö*. The contemporaries of one of the most beloved theater actors, Muratbek Ryskulov, published a monograph in honor of the actor. The monograph represents one of the best sources regarding the attitudes of intellectuals towards Western theater.

theater workers.”⁴⁷ The Commissars noted that most of these theaters failed to provide any education to the kolkhozniki, and the main problems were, once again, money and attendance. They requested that the authorities in Moscow raise the budget of 40,000 rubles to at least 60,000, and if possible to 100,000 rubles.⁴⁸ They warned that the kolkhoz theaters could not survive without this increase.

The SNK’s main concern was the quality and work ethic of actors, who failed to report to work on a regular basis. They pointed out that “old men playing a national instrument” does not constitute theater, and demanded that youthful and dynamic actors of the Russian Drama and Youth Theater should perform in kolkhoz theaters on a regular basis to train young kolkhozniks. The Youth Theater Troupe spent the summer season in Karakol and ail actors learned acting by watching the Youth Theater. As in Karakol, the kolkhoz actors elsewhere should be able to participate in acting courses three times a month, and auditions in front of more experienced actors would bring out hidden talents in some kolkhozes. Without human talent, no budget increase would improve these theaters.

The kolkhozniks may have been simply too busy to attend the performances. They came up with legitimate reasons, such as the harvest, to avoid attending plays. In other words, helping their families was their strategy of everyday resistance. In some ails, they tried to get out of untimely cultural events whenever they could, because they

⁴⁷ “The Report of the Department of Artistic Affairs at the Council of National Commissars of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, addressed to the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the Network and Activity of The Theatrical Establishments of the Republic,” October 1, 1938, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 1, d. 815, ll. 5-12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

did not coincide with traditional celebrations.⁴⁹ Problems with audience turnout may be interpreted in several ways: all audiences may have purposely avoided theater performances; what the administrators called apathy or lack of organization may have been deliberate avoidance, thus a type of “everyday resistance.” As James C. Scott has defined it, foot dragging and false compliance were the ordinary weapons of powerless groups, but in this case the behavior was by no means a collective and outright act of defiance.⁵⁰

Actors may have avoided training or attending the performances regularly because they were frustrated with the deficiencies in resources that were necessary to run a cultural institution such as theater. They also knew that they did not possess the skills or education to be successful on the stage. The tension between administrators, all actors, and audiences was revealed in various documents. A 1938 report on the “Results of the City Amateur Arts Activities Olympiad” referred to ongoing general problems with arts administration. The report complained that even in the capital city of Frunze, the activities were poorly prepared and presented.

The completed City Olympiad has shown that the supervision of and the participation in amateur art activities is worse than ever in the city. A fundamental change in the management of amateur art activities has become a necessity. The clubs, heads of committees, Komsomol and Trade-Unions, regional and city committees of Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia, and also the House of National Creativity and

⁴⁹ Tselikovskiy, in “The Report of the Department of Artistic Affairs at the Council of National Commissars of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, addressed to the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks on the Network and Activity of Theatrical Establishments of the Republic,” October 1, 1938, IML of TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 1, d. 815, ll. 8-10.

⁵⁰ James C. Scott defined “everyday resistance” of peasants “the prosaic but constant struggle between peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interest from them.” Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 29.

Department on Affairs of Arts must seriously address this issue. (V. Tselikovsky)⁵¹

What the reports considered “poor preparation of cultural events” was the result of many clubs relying too heavily on purely traditional entertainment. As mentioned above, the reports show that the organizers included traditional concert performances to encourage audiences to attend the modern Olympiad and plays. These concerts featured an ail or national talent such as akyns and manaschys who either sang, recited the *Manas*, or played a national instrument. The authoritative decree for the preparation of the Theater Olympiads listed the following requirement as the second most important condition of a successful event:

To fully exhibit the talent – the precious gems of the ail – the *manaschys*, *yrchys* or singers, *komuzchus*, *akyns*, story-tellers and so on – and to provide wide participation of the kolkhoz masses, and the whole community, both during preparation for the duration of the Olympiad.⁵²

Traditional performers and oral philosophers accepted this responsibility and took advantage of the official sanctioning of their art. In most celebrations, akyns sang praises of the achievements of their people who built kolkhozes, dams, factories, and other modern facilities. With their traditional *maktoo* (a song of tribute), the akyns congratulated the ail people on their successes in transforming their environment and educating future generations.⁵³ Appreciation of hard-laborers’ work was a prominent theme in akyns’ songs. Like Bölöbalaev’s piece, these very personal stories acknowledged the ail efforts to build up the ail economy. At the same time, they

⁵¹ “The Results of the City Amateur Arts Activities Olympiad,” August 30, 1938, p. 4.

⁵² “The Decree of the Bureau of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia on the Organization of All Kyrgyz Olympiad and Republican Celebration of Collective Farm Theaters,” August 28, 1938, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 19.

⁵³ Asankanov and Bekmuhamedova, *Akyndar jana manaschylar*, 28.

reflected on the hardships the people had to endure. A well-known akyn Osmonkul

Bölöbalaev (1887-1967) paid homage to a miner:⁵⁴

*Süykümdüü jüzü albyrait,
Kenine karay baskanda.
Bulchungy choyun burjuyat,
Burguchun kezep jatkanda.
Barbaygan kolu teng ishteyt,
Kömürün üröp kazganda.*

*He is walking into his own mining-
And his face radiates light.
He takes a pneumatic hammer-
And turns on the light-
His strong hands work in unison,
When he digs for his coal.*

Akyns appealed to Kyrgyz audiences as messengers of their authentic culture.

Their participation in Soviet cultural events made it possible for the ail populations to identify with these events as traditional akyns' message had changed in content, but not in spirit. Traditional akyns song topics include overcoming hardship, standing up against oppression, praising the brave, and keeping the collective memory alive. In other words, the akyns acknowledged the state-sanctioned achievement: "national in form, socialist in content." Bölöbalaev's cohort of akyns followed a generation of masters that included Kalygul (1785-1855), Arstanbek (1824-1878), Jengijok (1860-1918), and Moldo Kylych (1866-1917) whose songs had been repressed as "bourgeois nationalist." The new generation altered their message so that they did not offend the sensibilities of the Party, but kept singing about the same themes.

Ail audiences did not always temper their genuine reaction to artistic performances, and the ail intelligentsia took notice of this. Ail and regional newspapers published articles on the plays that Kolkhoz theaters performed, which attempted to construct "appropriate behavior patterns," according to the newspaper *Stalinetz*, suitable

⁵⁴ Ibid., 91.

for cultural events.⁵⁵ The language of the articles often had a sarcastic, even chastising tone. They warned readers (as potential audiences) that they were being watched and needed to exhibit discipline at these events.

Ail club administrators often wrote these articles as make-shift theater criticism. In their reviews, they were usually critical of both the performers and the audience.⁵⁶ On June 12, 1938, the *Stalinetz* newspaper of the village of Stalin published a scathing review of the Kolkhoz Theater's performance of Rakhmanov's play *Restless Old Age*. According to this article by an anonymous author, the premiere of the play was a total failure. It read: "The June nine performance of the troupe, under the direction of E. Korobov, appeared hasty and careless..." It was obvious that comrade Korobov failed to do his homework in recreating the image of the great scientist and Bolshevik Professor Timiriazev.⁵⁷ The article lashed out at the actors for long awkward pauses on stage because they did not remember their lines. It reported that the actors either just stood there with blank looks on their faces or hurried to deliver their lines "as if they were worried about missing their train."⁵⁸ The article remarked that the audience sat restlessly, hoping to leave as soon as possible. It could be interpreted that the behavior of both the actors and spectators showed that they were not interested in a play about a "great Bolshevik scientist."⁵⁹ Perhaps they wanted to be entertained, not lectured.

There was constant tension between the administrators in Frunze and those who implemented these cultural policies at the ail level. The minutes of one Art Council

⁵⁵ "A Restless Performance," *Stalinetz*, June 12, 1938, 25/2.

⁵⁶ For "negotiation of power," see Foucault, *Governmentality*.

⁵⁷ "A Restless Performance," *Stalinetz*, June 12, 1938, 25/2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Meeting of March 1940 speaks to these tensions. The March meeting took place at the Department on Artistic Affairs of the Kyrgyz SSR Council of National Commissioners and was widely attended by directors of theaters, art directors, and other arts workers. Their assessment of their kolkhoz/sovkhos theaters began with positive reports that listed a good number of plays and a respectable number of spectators, but in the end, gave a scornful account of the situation. The Artistic Director of Kyrgyz State Theater, Comrade Kuttubayev, summarized the sorry state of his theater by noting that the “the actors are using color pencils and tooth powder instead of make up. It is not laughable, but sad. It is a tragedy.”⁶⁰ The tragic state, in Kuttubayev’s words, of kolkhoz/sovkhos theaters surfaced because of these factors: the lack of general and professional education, corruption of administrators, minimal support from regional offices, and ethnic or religious tensions.⁶¹ As this suggests, regional or ail administrators believed in “cultural development,” but were not always satisfied with the resources the state gave them. The financial and resource problems and the lack of artistic training at the ail levels frustrated lower ranking administrators, but higher ranking administrators still blamed them for the unsuccessful performances and poor attendance records.

Many of the directors reiterated that kolkhoz actors could no longer sustain their theaters without basic resources. They argued that a few select and talented actors had been carrying these institutions because of their enthusiasm for theater and love for Kyrgyz audiences. Some of the directors lashed out at the higher authorities that such haphazard artistic culture only created disinterest and withdrawal among the audiences

⁶⁰ “The Minutes of the Art Council Meeting at the Department of Artistic Affairs at the Kyrgyz SSR Council of National Commissioners,” March 15, 1940, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 7, ll. 1-113.

⁶¹ Ibid.

and the actors. The Director of the Kirov Sovkhoz Theater, comrade Komintern (yes, this was his last name!) complained that the kolkhoz actors could not improve their skills without outside help. The artistic director of Kirov, Yavorsky also had been an actor, but had no time for lectures. Komintern, therefore, asked that lecturers from Frunze be sent to the kolkhoz theaters to encourage the talented and enthusiastic kolkhozniks. He passed on the sentiment of an actor: "For example, we have an actor named Pokatilov. He is illiterate; he can hardly read or write, but is engaging and diligent. He has raised the issue of illiteracy in the kolkhoz and asked us to start a school for the illiterate kolkhozniks."⁶²

Comrade Bebin, the artistic director of the Stalin Kolkhoz/Sovkhoz Theater, pointed out that they just finished reading the sixth chapter of *The History of the Party*, and learned much about "the dialectics and history of materialism." He added that in their drama education, they were working on "the topic of verbal communication." Kolkhoz actors knew more about what Stalin wrote about materialism than they did acting. In this way, Bebin, attempted to subtly bring this issue, a common problem, to the table. But, he argued that the educators in the kolkhoz clubs and Houses of Culture only lectured on ideological topics that were easy to obtain from the Party pamphlets. Professional and technical education fell by the wayside either because there were no qualified educators or no materials, or both.

The lack of educational tools and the indifference of educators arose as a fundamental issue, but paled in comparison to other accusations. A number of directors reported that some of the theater administrators in their districts extorted money and

⁶² Ibid.

goods from theaters. A Kyrgyz State Theater actor, Comrade Aidaraliyev, who used to be at the Jumgal Kolkhoz Theater had the courage, and perhaps the status, to accuse the former director of the Jumgal Theater of stealing. He claimed that the former director Mamyrkulov spent state funds intended for the theater for personal use. Allegedly, “Mamyrkulov took some expensive furniture to his home instead of using them in set designs. Despite such plunder of state funds, he has been appointed as the Chief of Naryn Regional Department of Arts.”⁶³

Aidaraliyev added that the director who replaced him, Isakov, was an ineffective manager of the theater, and he insisted that the Department of Arts send an experienced and honest director to Jumgal. The directors viewed the kolkhoz actors as willing but naïve participants, and the theater managers as either ignorant or corrupt leaders. They clearly saw the state as a redeemer who needed to hear about ail’s problems.⁶⁴

These directors considered themselves experts on Western theater, and were unforgiving of their non-Western actors, directors, and audiences. Timothy Mitchell has argued that colonized elites may become more zealous defenders of colonial culture than the colonizers.⁶⁵ The behavior of the theater directors in this context resonated with Mitchell’s argument when they portrayed an image of the kolkhozniks as immature and unrefined.⁶⁶ The language of “The Minutes of the Art Council Meeting” showed that the directors, especially non-Kyrgyz ones, were sympathetic to kolkhoz actors, but failed to refer to them as adults. This attitude reflected the European Soviet view of the small

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

⁶⁶ I do not equate the Soviet Union with its imperial predecessor as a colonial empire. Mitchell’s argument, however, does resonate on this specific venue, regarding the education of the “locals.”

people of the East, who needed to be educated in order to become part of Soviet society.⁶⁷ Although the European Soviets held similar views towards all peasants regardless of nationality, persons with Muslim and especially nomadic background were considered more child-like by Soviet administrators. Learned Kyrgyz such as the actor Aidaraliyev quickly adopted a similar view of the European Soviets towards his own people, as was common among the Western-educated elites. Kyrgyz elites could not accept the fact that most of the villagers were more interested in listening to the akyn from the ail rather than attending a Russian play. For these elites, defending Soviet culture meant claiming that Kyrgyz were like children who needed to be civilized.

Kyrgyz elites who came from the same background expressed impatience with their kolkhozniks. They wanted the actors and the audiences to show to the authorities that they were learning from their new cultural experiences. When these elites did not see evidence of this, they did not hesitate to chastise the misbehaving kolkhozniks. The non-Kyrgyz elites did more than chastise: they reported the misbehavior and asked for the punishment of these child-like former nomads. Kirov Theater's director Komintern reported:

Instead of creative work, the actors drink before the performance to get into the spirit of things. But, I look at them with disgust when they roll around drunk on the streets. Naturally, the Chief of the National Commissariat of Internal Affairs has told us that he does not wish to help our theater after those events.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For categorization of Soviet nationalities and nationalities policies, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*; Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below*; Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union*; Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23*; and Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

⁶⁸ "The Minutes of the Art Council Meeting at the Department of Artistic Affairs at the Kyrgyz SSR Council of National Commissioners," March 15, 1940, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 7, ll. 1-113.

Comrade Komintern also claimed that the chief of the commissariat did not pay any attention to the theater because he favored the House of Culture, of which he was also the director. He concluded: "In the raion, it is said that this is not a theater, but a crowd of drunkards." It is clear from this statement that the raion's population dismissed the troupe as a bunch of idle men.

The directors refrained from openly criticizing the authorities in the higher offices. Nevertheless, they identified unfavorable or sometimes desperate conditions of the clubs and the theaters in their reports. They complained about "not having a permanent space for their theaters," "being stuck in a tiny room in the House of Culture," "working in a dirty, and unventilated kolkhoz quarter," and "performing on a cold and wet floor, instead of a stage." Comrade Grebnov, the Artistic Director of Kalininsk Theater, mocked his theater's circumstances: "We are like cheerful beggars. We perform in a cold room night after night. The actor suffers and suffers." He concluded that the attrition rate among actors was appalling: in two and a half years, eighty actors came and left the Kalininsk Theater, which had a total staff of only twenty and he justified the actors' flight because of these conditions. It is interesting that the actors were allowed to flee despite the regulations of the kolkhoz; they resisted unfavorable conditions while risking punishment, although reports indicate that they were rarely punished.

Ethnic and religious tensions added to the difficulties of kolkhoz theaters. Kolkhozes developed the ethnic communities of the villages in which they were located by responding to regional languages and traditions. In the Fergana Valley of Southern Kyrgyzstan, for example, the majority of the kolkhozes were located in Uzbek villages.

In the Chui Valley, near Frunze, among the Kyrgyz, there was a smattering of small kolkhozes among Russian, German, Ukrainian, Uygur, and other peoples. The kolkhoz in Kalinin, where the population was mostly Ukrainian, required a Ukrainian language theater. Kalininsk Theater's artistic director Grebnov expressed his frustration with this circumstance: "We have no literature in the Ukrainian language. I contacted Kiev and Moscow about it but to no avail. We have no Ukrainian experts. I am Russian and yet I supervise at the Ukrainian theater." The fascinating fact remains, however, that Grebnov considered learning Ukrainian. On the one hand, Grebnov was responding to the ail's needs and desires; on the other, he was participating in what has been called Soviet "ethnophilia:" he wanted to stage Ukrainian performances like plays, poetry and musical numbers in his theater so that the Ukrainian kolkhozniks would attend. He either felt such dedication to his work or was afraid to lose his job.

In the late 1930s, because of the financial limitations, most institutions like the clubs had to give up on education and cultural events. A portion of income for theaters and the Olympiads came out of the kolkhoz and sovkhov budgets; each theater had a budget of 621 rubles per year, which would barely pay for the basic needs.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁹ Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 245-52. Alec Nove noted that in 1939, 46,000 out of 240,000 kolkhozes paid twenty kopecks per *trudoden* or labor day (meaning a unit of payment at kolkhozes that reflected the time and the type of job), and 15,700 did not pay their members at all. During the 1930s, the prices of manufactured products rose significantly in the USSR. Moreover, the harvests of 1933-36 were poor. As a result, food and manufactured good shortages were rampant. During the second half of the 1930s, the average price of a kilogram of vegetable oil was 1.30 rubles, a kilogram of the cheapest rye flour was 1.60 rubles, and a loaf of rye-bread was 1 ruble. A pair of leather shoes cost between five-hundred and one-thousand rubles. Despite all these conditions, many kolkhozniks managed to feed their families because of their private stock holdings and the sales in the free market; see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 140-42. Sheila Fitzpatrick pointed out that in 1937; a typical kolkhoznik working with livestock earned 1.3 labor days for men and 1.1 labor days for women (per actual workday). In culture related jobs, mostly held by women, the income was under 1 labor day. In 1938, in the Tatar Republic, a kolkhoz driver made between 150 and 300 per month, a state-sanctioned and privileged income that exceeded the income of a kolkhoz chairman.

following newspaper reports provide a perspective on the incomes and living conditions of cotton-workers in kolkhozes. Salamatkhan Ibragimova, Assistant Brigadier of the Birlik Kolkhoz located at the Aravan Raion wrote:

This year we will collect more than twice amount of cotton than last year. Currently, we are actively preparing for this. Last year, I have earned 455 labordays. My husband and I have received 8,200 rubles (ten rubles for each laborday.) Recently, we have repaired our house. We live well. There is no shortage of anything.⁷⁰

Mastashkhan Satybaldieva, Assistant Brigadier of Dzerzhinsky Kolkhoz at the Bazar-Kurgan Raion wrote:

We have received five rubles of income for each laborday in 1936. The income of kolkhozniki has increased in connection with the growth of cotton production. The cost of a laborday has reached fifteen rubles in 1937.⁷¹

Although these brigadiers claimed that their lives were good, people needed food and clothes before theater, other artistic activities, or even cultural education. If there were to be any improvements, the total 1939 theater budget of 900,000 rubles needed to be increased radically. Facing these difficulties, it was difficult for ail administrations to allocate money for education and culture.⁷²

In light of the economic realities of Kyrgyzstan in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Kyrgyz Theater appears as a miniature laboratory of Soviet cultural politics. The directors and actors were out to revolutionize Kyrgyz culture and make Soviet citizens. Theaters in clubs halls were intended to help them achieve this grandiose goal. Problems that arose should not have been allowed to slow down progress in the cultural sphere. As

⁷⁰ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January 12, 1938, 2.

⁷¹ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, January 15, 1938, 3.

⁷² "The Outcome of the Republican Celebration of the Kolkhoz Theaters of the Kyrgyz SSR," August 1, 1939, TsGAKSSR, f. 1603, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 29.

the Artistic Director of Kyrgyz State Theater, Comrade Kuttubayev pointed out:

“Stalin said: ‘Cadres solve everything.’”

By the eve of Second World War, the people had endured sedentarization, collectivization, and the purges. As important as it was for the administrators, entertainment and education meant little to many people in Kyrgyzstan. Kolkhoz theater audiences learned to get around the authorities, skipped plays and lectures. Kolkhoz actors learned to avoid performances and turn to their own types of entertainment. The authorities, in turn, allowed the celebrations and Olympiads to include concerts of all musicians and performers. They included plays that told the tales of the regional protagonists. All this did not happen peacefully. The Soviet state forced the nomadic herders to become settled kolkhoz farmers and severely punished their natural leaders like the aksakals who spoke up and resisted so-called cultural development. In the 1930s, the Stalinist culture, however, allowed certain concessions and permitted some ethnically-grounded cultural celebrations. Kyrgyz theater professionals of this era who were versed in both Soviet and traditional cultural forms helped add indigenous elements to the Soviet theater. They included their own music, costumes and set designs in the performances and thus shaped them in a way more suited Kyrgyz audiences. They reinterpreted Soviet position on artistic performance for their populations.



FIGURE 26: *Manas* Opera, source: *Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopediiasy*.



FIGURE 27: Bübüsara Beishenalieva, source: www.numismondo.com.



FIGURE 28: Muratbek Ryskulov, source: Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva's personal archive.

CHAPTER SIX

SELF-FASHIONING KYRGYZNESS AMONG WOMEN

All pioneering work is theatrical.¹

The above statement was Aleksandra Kollontai's response to critics who accused her of excessive theatricality when she brought Central Asian women to various Moscow *Zhenotdel* conferences and asked them to tear off their veils.² Kollontai's sentiment was not lost on many young Central Asian activists who used such theatrical promotions of unveiling as the most fundamental sign of women's progress. The older generations, on the other hand, saw unveiling and other "progressive" changes in women's status as a vicious assault on their way of life.

A mother and daughter humorously illustrated this tension between the supporters and opponents of the Soviet Union's approach to women's liberation in an interview on November 5, 1995. Nazira Ryskulova, a mother in her seventies and a retired *kolkhoznitsa*, declared without hesitation:

When they came to my family's bozui, my parents hid me in the quilt chest. They were not going to let the Russians to take me to the school. They did not want me to learn the Russian ways and became like those overly guileless Russian women. I am almost eighty now, and still refuse to speak a word of Russian.³

While I interviewed Nazira Ryskulova, her daughter Anara Sadykova, a professor in her forties, affectionately smiled and gently tapped her mother's hand. Following this demonstration of respect, she unflinchingly contradicted her mother:

¹ Bryant, *Mirrors of Moscow*, 121-22.

² *Zhenotdel* (Women's Bureau of the Communist Party, 1919-1930). *Zhensektor* (the lower-level Women's Section of the Party) replaced the *Zhenotdel* in 1934.

³ Interviews with Anara Sadykova and Nazira Ryskulova (I am using pseudonyms because I sensed some amount of hesitation on the part of the women), (Osh, Kyrgyzstan, November 5, 1995).

If I followed my mother's example, I would have not become who I am now. I am the dean of the mathematics department at the university. It is remarkable that I come from a family of illiterates. If it were not for the Soviet liberation of the Muslim women, we would all be in the same position of other Muslim women in the world. I am thankful for the change. I learned everything practical I know from the activities of pioneers and the Komsomol. I learned about the Western culture from the movies, plays, and books in the Zhenotdel Clubs.

The good-natured but frank tension between these two women was common in Kyrgyz society. Some women of Ryskulova's generation, who came of age in the 1930s, were staunch believers in the state's policy of women's liberation, but their daughters became disillusioned with the state, especially after Stalin's purges of the late 1930s.⁴ Some women saw themselves as victims or objects of these policies while others believed that they were active participants in the so-called cultural development that changed Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's lives in Kyrgyzstan.

This chapter studies the images of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women, living in Kyrgyzstan, which club documents helped forge. The chapter specifically includes Uzbek women because the cultural revolutionary policies of the Soviets often set Uzbek and Kyrgyz women's cultural practices in opposition to each other. The Soviet regime saw women both as objects of and participants in cultural development of Kyrgyz society. The delegation of such significant responsibility to women reflected the Soviet state's desire to exhibit Kyrgyz and Uzbek women as symbols of so-called cultural

⁴ During my interviews and my archival research, I have found little evidence of the direct effect of Stalin's purges among the ordinary Kyrgyz majority who lived in ails. According to the people I have interviewed, the purges mostly destroyed the families and lives of well-known figures such as writers and politicians. The silence of the ordinary families on this important matter might be interpreted in two ways: they were either secretive about their families' past or truthful when expressing that their families were not affected by the purges.

development. This chapter examines club documents of the late 1920s and 1930s that provide evidence that women were faced with competing and unstable claims on their identity and social role. These documents show that Soviet authorities and intellectuals saw the women of Kyrgyzstan as a symbol of cultural revolution, while their societies continued to view them as keepers of their ethnic traditions. This chapter argues that a significant number of women used these claims to fashion a new Soviet Kyrgyz community by participating in cultural programs such as theater. They, like the men described earlier in the dissertation, negotiated their position between old and new to create this new community.

The primary sources for the chapter are club documents, my interviews with Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, and Chingiz Aitmatov's early short stories (from the 1950s and early 1960s). I rely on Kümüşhaliyeva in order to provide the perspective of a living legend who is seen as a prime example of Kyrgyz women's "cultural development." I bring in Aitmatov's representation of women in order to demonstrate how the most influential Kyrgyz writer helped construct Soviet Kyrgyzness after the period discussed in this dissertation.

The characters in Chingiz Aitmatov's early work reflected how the state and Kyrgyz intellectuals created Kyrgyz Soviet heroes like Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva. Aitmatov's women and men symbolized the ideal citizens who forged Soviet identities, cloaked in their national traditions. They represented the hard-working *kolkhoznitsa*, such as Jamila, who broke the chains of tradition. They symbolized the first ail teachers, such as Dūishön, who took over the job of educating long-neglected Kyrgyz girls.

Aitmatov provided Kyrgyz girls with role-models. He constructed a history of the Kyrgyz *ail* in which Kyrgyz girls would be proud of their achievements and the cultural changes in their Soviet past.

During the pre-Bolshevik era, women of Kyrgyzstan conducted lives that became objectionable to the Bolsheviks. Among Kyrgyz, pre-Islamic traditions persisted in key social institutions like engagement, marriage, and inheritance. Kyrgyz clans and tribes traditionally gave the leadership and decision-making authority in all matters, including the resolution of domestic disputes, to leaders called *manap* and *bai*, who were not only in charge of legal matters, but were also the guardians of domestic and moral issues like girls' and women's duties in the household.⁵ The Bolsheviks outlawed the leadership of *manaps* and *bais*; one of the official justifications for this was the liberation of women from the patriarchy.

Indigenous gender relations were one of the main targets of the Bolsheviks and clubs. Club administrators attempted to do away with most of the pre-Islamic marriage traditions that persisted in ails and remote corners of this mountainous country. In the name of women's liberation, they encouraged the eradication of *belkuda* (cradle-marriage), *kız ala kachuu* (bride-stealing), and *kalyng* (bride-price). According to the official rhetoric, clubs were the most appropriate and convenient place for revolutionary education regarding traditional crimes against women. The location of women in prayer

⁵ See Erşahin, *Kırgızlar ve İslamiyet*, 19-20. *Manaps* and *bais* assumed the leadership roles as elected officials until the nineteenth century, at which time they began passing on the leadership to their sons and other male relatives.

sessions and rituals, which exhibited an amalgamation of pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions, also needed to be secularized.⁶

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, official images of emancipated, educated and united women, who supposedly severed their ethnic ties in favor of an all-inclusive Soviet community, promised new horizons for female artists as crucial participants in cultural revolution. Furthermore, these images created a climate which obliged many women of Kyrgyz SSR to take on the responsibilities of cultural revolutionaries. Clubs were one of the main venues where the women of Kyrgyzstan encountered revolutionary Soviet ideology, literature and arts. Many female artists, who had been educated in clubs, became national heroes in their fields. In national festivals, club events, and celebrations, these artists represented the women of Kyrgyz SSR (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar, German, Russian, and others), their national arts, and their whole nation.

The state's rhetoric of emancipation of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women created complex issues that resulted from the official anti-religious, anti-nationalist discourse. Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's emancipation confronted the institutions of patriarchy, familial structures, gender relations, division of labor, and religion. Soviet revolutionaries selected the institutions that were either the most visible or the most contrary to Communist ideals. If an Uzbek women's veil symbolized social status, her ethnicity represented her Oriental identity. Trinh T. Minh-ha referred to the Oriental identity of "Third World women" as "specialness." This phrase is particularly apt when discussing the Soviet revolutionaries' approach to Uzbek women. The non-Central

⁶ Kyrgyz women did not always pray in isolation from men as required by orthodox Islam. For more details on Kyrgyz and Islam see, Erşahin, *Kırgızlar ve İslamiyet*.

Asian female Soviet revolutionaries “enjoyed the privilege of preparing the way for one’s more *unfortunate sisters*.” In essence, non-Central Asians put the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks not only in a subordinate but a surrogate position.⁷ In other words, these women became the stand-ins for ignorant and innocent children. As a result, in the relationship between the two groups of women, the non-Central Asian women took the powerful position of superior teachers and revolutionaries of the inferior Oriental, who was “special.” By assigning Kyrgyz and Uzbek women a “special” place in the larger Soviet society, the revolutionaries established a power dynamic that perpetuated the Oriental identity of these women and their societies.⁸ Kyrgyz and Uzbek women always remained tucked in a corner of Soviet universality as those who were difficult to reform.

The revolutionaries reduced Kyrgyz and Uzbek women to a socially and culturally inferior role. In the meantime, citing the injustices these women endured at the hands of their male relatives, the revolutionaries assigned these women the role, in Gregory J. Massell’s terms, of the “surrogate proletariat.”⁹ Both socially and economically, these women symbolized the downtrodden Oriental. As Trinh has put it, those who could make it on their own needed “special care” from those who have made it.¹⁰ In the process, the female Soviet revolutionaries negated all Kyrgyz and Uzbek traditions that they viewed as harmful to women. In so doing, they forced upon these

⁷ Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*.

⁸ See Joan Scott’s work on the power dynamics of identity. Scott, “Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity,” 14-15.

⁹ Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*.

¹⁰ Trinh, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 86-89.

women an artificial choice: ethnicity or modern womanhood.¹¹ In effect, Soviet revolutionaries operated in divisive terms when they approached women's emancipation in Kyrgyzstan.

The main goal of the Soviet policy regarding the women of Kyrgyzstan was to emancipate and educate them. Kyrgyz and Uzbek women of Kyrgyzstan symbolized "the backward traditions of the East" to Soviet revolutionaries. The CPSU's first step in attacking these traditions was the promotion and then the enforcement of unveiling in clubs and other cultural and educational centers. A number of Central Asian women attended the Second International Conference of Communist Women in Moscow during the spring of 1921. Throughout the 1920s, Central Asian women gradually began to join their European counterparts in Zhenotdel activities in the villages of Central Asia. They visited as many local Party offices and clubs as possible to talk about unveiling. The culmination of women's liberation activities came in 1927, when, on International Women's Day (May 8), many women publicly shed their veils. In many Uzbek cities, women threw their veils onto a bonfire as a symbolic act.¹² There were many political and ideological speeches on the necessity and benefits of unveiling and individual women's testimonies complemented these political speeches.

When setting up an official emancipation policy, Bolshevik administrators compared the religious and ethnic traditions of Uzbek and Kyrgyz women. Club administrators perceived the revolutionizing of Kyrgyz women's social roles to be easier

¹¹ Ibid., 106. Trinh has described this imposed duality as something that "bounces back and forth from one extreme to another, as if races of color annul sex, as if women can never be ethnic."

¹² See Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; Edgar, *Tribal Nation*; Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*; and Kamp, "Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s."

than that of Uzbek women. Uzbeks paid closer attention to women's traditional space in an orthodox Muslim society. Uzbek women were not able to work outside their homes. When they worked in the fields, they were isolated from men. Kyrgyz women and men, on the other hand, shared the same space, both at home and at work in the pasture. Because of the shared space and strong pre-Islamic traditions, Kyrgyz women rarely saw themselves as inferior to men. On the contrary, the common wisdom held that women worked harder than men even if the job was considered "a man's job." In Kyrgyz society, women proved themselves, and thus earned respect and authority by doing a typically "man's job." Kyrgyz women may have had more freedoms and authority in comparison to Uzbek women, but they had to work for it. When they became members of clubs, they continued their double duties at home and in the field.

Beginning in the late 1920s, educated, emancipated, unveiled, and successful Central Asian women such as Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva were repeatedly lauded in newspapers. The preoccupation of Soviet revolutionaries with the attires of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women was the product of a shallow gaze into the complex cultures of the region.¹³ The Soviet state's hasty drive for so-called cultural development forced regional administrators of education and ail club managers to look for simplistic and pragmatic approaches to the complex cultural issues surrounding women's communal role in Kyrgyzstan.

¹³ James C. Scott has posited that the modernizing states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries aspired to simplify their societies and cultures in order to improve and rule them more manageably. Scott suggested that these "authoritarian high modernist" state projects included three elements: the aspiration to order nature and society; the unrestrained use of power to achieve the modernist designs; and a weakened and non-resistant civil society. For more on a discussion of state-imposed modernity see Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

Concerning women's role in society, religion was only one of the traditional institutions to be dismantled. The Soviet Central Committee wanted Central Asian women to be more active outside their homes. The State needed them in agriculture, schools, offices, and other public places; in other words, their emancipation was absolutely necessary for the improvement of the Soviet economy. Agents of the state such as Zhenotdel organized programs to free their so-called newly found agents of change. Starting in Tashkent in 1925, women's clubs began cultural and social work with the goal of making women productive members of the Soviet society and economy.¹⁴ The State took control of women's lives and diminished the input of their male kin and the rest of their families. As the official rhetoric dictated, clubs then helped women acquire new skills and learn new trades, which helped them to enter the work force.

All authorities went to great lengths to show that women's full participation in society accelerated the process of "cultural development" for the Kyrgyz. According to Party administrators in Kyzyl Kyia, in March 1925, Uzbek and Kyrgyz women organized women's circles. They applauded the outcome of this cooperation suggesting that these women together facilitated mass cultural work. According to the newspaper *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, "Uzbek and Kyrgyz women jointly sent a petition to the Oblast authorities, asking for a special school for women."¹⁵ The article asserted that these women took the initiative to represent Kyzyl Kyia's workers and peasants. The Soviet authorities

¹⁴ Shirin Akiner has pointed out that women's clubs were "a remarkable innovation." Akiner has argued that the State succeeded in segregating women from men, thereby limiting the interference of the men in women's decisions and lives. See, Akiner, "Between Tradition and Modernity: the Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women," 269.

¹⁵ "The Report on the Mass Culture Efforts in Kyzyl Kyia," in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (March 2, 1927): 2.

recognized that local women's involvement in cultural projects was essential in attracting the other women of the neighboring villages and men. Ethnic mixing, if possible, would be the best gift of all. Nine years later in June 1936, a news article about club activities appeared in Kyzyl Kyia. The article boasted about the coal-mining women of the area successfully participating in the First Olympiad of Amateur Arts of Coal Miners of Central Asia and proudly concluded that the women of Kyzyl Kyia held their own among coal miners from various parts of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.¹⁶

Uzbek and Kyrgyz women's collaboration seemed more newsworthy than that of the Russian and Kyrgyz women. The elevated position of the Russian and other European implants was a given fact, and their impact on the "backward" cultures was taken for granted. The indigenous populations had no choice but to cooperate with the Soviets from the western regions. For the Soviet authorities, the stakes were high in the ethnically diverse Osh region. They sought to show that the ethnic communities would work and live together well under the Soviet plan. They counted on the women's organizations to bring these communities closer. The official language in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* articles shows that whenever a community made overtures towards another, however small it may have been, the authorities portrayed it as exemplary behavior. They placed a significant emphasis on the relations between specific groups such as Uzbek and Kyrgyz. Thus, local authorities constantly reassured the higher offices that they were promoting ethnic mixing among women. When the authorities showcased such behavior in ethnically volatile areas like Osh, they highlighted the friendly approach of one local ethnic group towards another.

¹⁶ Silver, "Artistic Olympiad of Miners," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (June 10, 1936): 4.

Ail authorities provided many other examples of inter-ethnic cooperation and meticulously reported the ethnic background of women attending Zhenotdel and other club meetings. For example, they made a point of showing that the number of Uzbek girls attending school steadily increased. *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* reported that in Osh Oblast the number of Uzbek women attending educational institutions dramatically increased, thanks to the efforts of local Zhenotdel. The article boasted that in 1927 the number of women in Osh schools tripled (47 students in 1926 and 147 in 1927). The numbers also increased in the Girl-Pioneers and Komsomol. In addition, due to Zhenotdel's hard work, 57 women became Communist Party members in 1927, doubling the numbers from 1926. The quoted statistics show that only 18 of the 147 women attending the School of Liquidation of Illiteracy were Kyrgyz; the rest were Uzbek, Russian, and other nationalities. The newspaper article also quoted that out of 187 Komsomol members only 38 were Kyrgyz. It listed 61 Uzbek women, but neglected to report the nationalities of the rest.¹⁷ Official discourse always favored ethnic (or titular) nationalities as worthy topic of discussion, because the authorities were busily engaged in creating nations.

FIGHTING THE VEIL

Soviet authorities dealt with unfamiliar cultures and people more comfortably in isolation. They identified a specific problem in each group, declared it anti-Soviet, and attacked it. In their eyes, Uzbek women represented the religious opposition. They argued that the Kyrgyz women perpetuated the nomadic lifestyle which hindered the acceptance of socialism in pastures. Authorities based their categorizations on the

¹⁷ "The Report on the Work of the Osh Oblast Zhenotdel," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, March 16, 1927.

conclusions of imperial and Soviet ethnographers who were themselves influenced by the crude divisions (settled versus nomadic; pastoral versus agricultural; walking, horse-riding or reindeer-breeding) of the seventeenth-century frontiersmen.¹⁸ Kyrgyz women became the center of attention when the authorities addressed “the problem of nomadism.”

Soviet authorities noticed and identified certain characteristics in Kyrgyz women that were different from that of Uzbek and Tajik women.¹⁹ These observations were mostly superficial and haphazard. The authorities had learned to recognize the difference between religious garb and a traditional everyday outfit. For example, Kyrgyz female clothing seemed less offensive to the revolutionaries. Therefore, their reform policies targeted southern women such as Uzbeks and Tajiks who wore clothing perceived as religious garb.²⁰ Kyrgyz women did not need to unveil since their small scarves, which only partially covered their heads, were not considered a religious symbol.

In this scenario, women’s bodies become both exotic and unattainable. Both of these images construct a “powerfully negative affect,” placing women in the position of untouchable objects of desire.²¹ It was less complicated for state revolutionaries to attack

¹⁸ Slezkine, “Naturalist versus Nations,” 32; and Brower, “Islam and Ethnicity,” 129-133.

¹⁹ “The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in Karakol and Naryn region, June 1 to August 1, 1925,” (August 12, 1925), TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, ll. 16-17.

²⁰ During the Fourth Kyrgyz Party Conference in 1927, the year of the hujum, Party members officially declared the “Agitation Campaign for the Emancipation of Women.” The conference report announced that since the eighth of May about six hundred Uzbek women took off their *parandji* (a head to toe veil). The report focused on the Uzbek women and made no mention of Kyrgyz women’s unveiling. “The Report of the Fourth Communist Party Conference of the Kyrgyz *Oblast* Committee,” November, 18-21, 1927, Frunze, 62-63.

²¹ In her examination of modernist themes and women in twentieth century Chinese literature, Rey Chow has pointed out the modernist narratives demonstrate a preoccupation with “liberation” and with national or ethnic “unity.” Chow has suggested that the relationship between the “details” like women’s clothing and the visions of reform and revolution subordinates femininity to the state’s idealized image of the modern

first visible signs of traditionalism, like the veil (*paranja or chachvon*), while other problems directly related to women's bodies, such as kalyng and polygamy were harder to tackle. But the veil was out in the open, in the market place and on the street. All clothing, including the veil, was a powerful reminder of religious, ethnic, local, personal, and sexual identity.²² Many Central Asian men wore distinct hats that distinguished them as Uzbeks or Kyrgyz or Tatars. Similarly, Central Asian women expressed their ethnic and regional community characteristics in sometimes obvious, other times subtle ways, such as the way they tied their scarves.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Party expressed that the primary goal of *hujum* was to expose patriarchal oppression and purge it from Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's lives, but Uzbeks and Kyrgyz resisted the unveiling campaign.²³ Resistance included the murders of thousands of unveiled women by the hands of their own communities. What was private and sacred went underground, so that families could practice their traditions in secret. Many surviving women learned to use this cultural change to their advantage and even worked with the State. They taught the State how to soften the blow and present unveiling as a positive development.

The revolutionaries, among them Marxist feminists, educators, activists, artists, and Zhenotdel members, found the social standing of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women

women. Her argument applies to the Soviet assault on the representations of tradition such as perceived domestic exploitation in Kyrgyzstan. See, Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity*, 85.

²² Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse:" 146.

²³ Kamp, "Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s:" 274. As Douglas Northrop has asserted, the Party "equated the practice of particular kinds of family life with loyalty to the Soviet cause." Northrop has argued further that in the eyes of the Party the unveiling issue became "synonymous with Bolshevism in southern Central Asia. For more see Northrop, "Languages of Loyalty: Gender, Politics and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan, 1927-1941" and idem, *Veiled Empire*.

abhorrent. These revolutionaries, raised and educated in the European and Russian traditions, viewed both the bodies and the minds of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women as potential objects of drastic cultural “transformation.” For the revolutionaries, the hidden bodies, dramatized by the veil and other clothing that Muslim women wore, constituted a serious roadblock to the modernization of the Soviet society.²⁴ Unveiling these women, therefore, was a significant accomplishment for these revolutionaries. Partha Chatterjee has asserted that according to the dominant Western view veiled Muslim women are the signs of “the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country.”²⁵ In the Soviet view, Kyrgyz and Uzbek women were either physically tucked away in their homes or covered from head to toe out in the public. According to official discourse, the minds of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women needed to be active and vibrant in order for the Soviet society to be modernized. These women’s unveiling, therefore, was a political and strategic priority.²⁶

Unveiling played a significant role in the women’s liberation movement in the southern regions of Central Asia such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Southern Kyrgyzstan. In the Uzbek context, Douglas Northrop has shown that Party leaders created an emblem of nationality and backwardness, both embodied in the veil.

²⁴ Women’s bodies become the target of change in most modernist ideologies and political processes. Even prior to modernist nation-state projects, women’s emancipation occupied a central role when states considered social and cultural reforms. For example, both the late Ottoman and Russian imperial reformers and intellectuals acknowledged that Muslim women, wearing a veil, could not function properly in a developing society. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the Western European models of emancipated women encouraged the women of Ottoman Turkey to modify their attires for less conservative, more European clothing. Similarly, Tatar servants of Russian aristocracy, and later upper-class Tatar women in the Russian Empire gradually began unveiling. See Geraci, *Window on the East*, on the conversions of the Tatars and the changes in the Tatar culture during the final years of Tsarist Russia.

²⁵ Chatterjee, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women,” 622.

²⁶ Northrop, “Nationalizing Backwardness, Gender, Empire and Uzbek Identity:” 191- 220.

Northrop has argued that the unveiling project of the Party unintentionally made the veil a symbol of the Uzbek nation. The veil, in turn, became a cultural marker to defend, and a cause for resistance among the Uzbeks. In Kazakhstan and the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan the veil did not carry such inflammatory significance because of the less strict veiling traditions of the nomadic populations.

As Adrienne Edgar has pointed out, women's emancipation helped Soviet revolutionaries weaken indigenous ties.²⁷ The sacred private space of the Central Asian cultures fell under threat because of the women's liberation movement. When the movement forced womanhood out into the public, it assaulted ethnic and religious traditions. Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's participation in Women's Day festivities caused a great deal of anxiety in their societies. The *zhenotdel* demanded Kyrgyz and Uzbek women to attend the festivities as an act of rebellion against what Soviet officials called "feudalism," or patriarchy, represented by their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons.

Official reports demonstrate that southern villages and ails, where many ethnicities resided, were the target areas for unveiling and anti-religious activities. On September 5, 1932, the Central Executive Committee of Kyrgyz ASSR reported the results of the unveiling and anti-religious education activities among the national minorities of Sulyuktü, Üch-Kurgan and Aravan raions:

In the territory of Sulyuktü raion, twenty percent of the population is Uzbek (9,798 people) and fifteen percent is Tajik (8,503 people). There are seven Uzbek and two Tajik *chaikhanas*, but their work does not reach the public. There are no Red Corners for these Uzbek and Tajik women. In the village of Isfana, although the women are competent, the Muslim clergy has great influence. The women used to leave their homes without their *parandji*, but now they are trapped indoors. In Sulyukta settlement

²⁷ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 222.

council and Koltsia, there is only one Red Chaikhana of national minorities that is the dramatic circle of the Tatars. In the Aravan-Burinskii raion seventy-five percent of the population belongs to national minorities. There are 33 Red Chaikhanas of national minorities, two Zhenotdel clubs, and three Uzbek women were prepared to take over the position of the kolkhoz timekeepers. The women of Osh Zhenotdel club are inactive because female workers in that region are absent.²⁸

The language of this and similar reports indicate that all administrators found unveiling and education work among the more observant Muslim minorities challenging. These “minorities” were Uzbeks, Uygurs, and Tajiks.²⁹ The rhetoric focused on the differences between more observant Muslim women and nomadic Muslim women. As discussed in Chapter Three, Soviet authorities considered Kazakh and Kyrgyz women nominal Muslims, and therefore less of a challenge. Kyrgyz Club documents such as the one above made a point of these differences between Kyrgyz and Uzbek women in Osh and elsewhere.

BATTLING NOMADISM

Kyrgyz and Kazakh women of nomadic backgrounds posed a distinct problem for the Soviet revolutionaries. To begin with, the Kyrgyz approach to Islam and Islamic laws differed from that of the settled Central Asians. Following their gradual conversion to Islam during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Kyrgyz selectively adopted Muslim traditions. Prior to Soviet domination, their nomadic ancestors had forged a religious tradition that synthesized pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions. Women’s status in

²⁸ “The Report of Public Culture Section of the National Commissariats of Education of the Kyrgyz Trade Union on the network of political education operation among local populations and national minorities,” July 17, 1931, TsGAKSSR, f. 653, op. 7, d. 151, ll. 23-25.

²⁹ In contrast, some other Muslim minorities such as the Tatars, Bashkirs, and Dungans (Chinese Muslims) were reportedly more open to the unveiling and anti-religious activity. One reason for this might be that most Tatars, Bashkirs, and Dungans traditionally did not use full body veils, while many Uzbeks, Uygurs and Tajiks did. The latter group of nationalities rarely exposed their hair or bodies in public.

society changed little. In addition, the socio-economic structures of the nomadic people contributed to the peculiarities in Kyrgyz women's status in comparison to the other Muslim women of Central Asia.

According to official documents nomadism was the primary obstacle to education among Kyrgyz women. Club officials were told that women would only be free from all this if they gained economic strength and broke with nomadic customs. Ail reports and manuals reflected official efforts to educate women in order to eradicate nomadism:

One of the most important tasks of the summer cultural and educational work of the oblast-raion is the cultural servicing of the masses in the nomadic pastures. The following form of work in pasture is the public political education work: organizing Red Yurts, conversations, public readings, lectures, presentations, films and plays; and involving the public in cultural and educational work.

Working with provincial woman is not less of an important task than that of political education activity. It is necessary to organize special female Red Yurts, children's sites, and points of eradication of illiteracy to serve up to fifty percent of women in the pasture.³⁰

Many reports like this reiterated and repeatedly emphasized the importance of nomadic women's education. The intent of official policy was to end nomadic traditions such as bride-stealing to promote women's emancipation in Kyrgyz areas. In 1930, the Susamyr pasture council organized 42 female "points of eradication of illiteracy" and one Red Yurt for Women. In this small encampment, 22 women attended courses in reading and writing. The courses also emphasized "the war against everyday crimes;" these crimes included underage marriages and taking bride money as akin to bride-stealing according to official documents. A report shows that during the lectures in Susamyr, women

³⁰ "The instruction Manual of the People's Commissariat of the Education of the Kyrgyz ASSR for the *oblast* and *raion* offices and for the inspectors of the executive committees of culture and education in the pasture," March 1929, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 1, d. 229, ll. 22-24.

admitted to recent cases of bride money and underage marriages, which resulted in twelve criminal trials against the men who perpetrated these crimes. Four women out of twenty-two in attendance “demonstrated antagonistic attitudes toward the agitation.” The report simply indicated that these four women (all “*baisko-manapskii*,” meaning nomadic aristocrats) left the course.³¹ The Party punished men more severely than women because it viewed men as patriarchal villains, while women, on the other hand, were victims who unwittingly perpetuated “backward” traditions. The Party constructed a gendered notion of the juridical subject: because only men had agency, only they could be punished under the law.³²

Echoing the official rhetoric, Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva claimed that her own cultural development required that she abandon nomadic life. Born in 1917 in Tököldösh ail, near Frunze, Kümüşhaliyeva lived through the transition from Russian imperial colonialism to the Soviet multinational system. To Kümüşhaliyeva, being cultured was incompatible with nomadism. As a result, she relinquished her comfortable clothes and attitude in favor of modern outfits and more regimented behavior of sedentary people like that of Russians, Uzbeks and Tajiks. She, however, refused to change more intimate and family related behaviors that were closely tied to her ethnicity. She argued that sedentarization was only the first step toward building this “new Soviet woman.”³³

Learning to read and write replaced learning to ride a horse, tending the flocks, making a

³¹ “The Report of the Sixth Communist Party Conference of the Kyrgyz *Oblast* Committee,” June 8-10, 1930, Frunze, pp. 129-130 and 192-130.

³² See, Engelstein, “Gender and the Juridical Subject: Prostitution and Rape in Nineteenth-Century Russian Criminal Codes,” and Viola, “Bab’i Bunty and Peasant Women’s Protest During Collectivization.”

³³ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman, Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53*, 75-6.

felt carpet, and assembling a bozüi. This process began at a very young age for Kümüşhaliyeva.

Kümüşhaliyeva's adoption of so-called modernity had many parallels among Kyrgyz women, at least in the artistic world. The village of Tököldösh raised three other successful female artists. Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, Saira Kiyzbayeva,³⁴ Baken Kydykeieva,³⁵ and Darkül Kiiükova,³⁶ who along with Kümüşhaliyeva, became known as the "four daughters of Tököldösh." They all attended School Number Five in Tököldösh.³⁷ Kümüşhaliyeva argued that although there is no doubt that all three of her "girl friends" were very talented, they owed their successes to the Kyrgyz State Drama Theater. She pointed out that School Number Five took all of them under its wings and organized theater circles.

Nomadic Central Asians like the young Kümüşhaliyeva learned to see themselves as taking part in a promising new generation that belonged to the modern, international communist world. They were expected to downplay their nomadism and denounce their social standing that often originated from their economic status. Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva's nomadic family made a good living trading animal products; such privilege would haunt her family after the NEP period. Kümüşhaliyeva's family, like many others who made a living from animal husbandry, lived fairly comfortable lives during the first decade of the Soviet Union, but they became one of the many victims of the "dekulakization" campaign in 1929, at the end of the NEP. Kümüşhaliyeva's family was one of its many victims.

³⁴ Karypkulov, *Chui Oblusu (Chuiskaia Oblast') Entsiklopediia*, 595. See the Biographies.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 605. See the Biographies.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 612. See the Biographies. Also, see Baken Kydykeieva and Darkül Kiiükova (Figure 29) on page 273.

³⁷ Zhunushov, *Mastera Stseni*, 15-78.

Her father was imprisoned for a year; her uncle was killed for owning a cheese factory; and she, herself, was labeled a “daughter of kulaks” by the communist officials in Tököldösh. Because of her wealthy nomadic family, Kümüşhaliyeva could not fully belong to so-called socialist brotherhood. Kümüşhaliyeva described her official status as a kulak’s daughter, but her *actual* identity as a nomadic Kypchak. She provided an anecdote on this issue: “I am a descendant of Musulmankul Khan, who supported and helped Kudaiar Khan to become a khan of Kokand in the nineteenth century. I had to hide this fact from everyone, but they caught me for being a daughter of a wealthy nomadic man anyway.”

Both official correspondence and the equally powerful rumor mill dictated that one could not be an acceptable and complete Communist if one did not believe in the emancipation of nomadic women. One of the items in the resolution instructed the Oblast administrators to “punish low-level local Soviet authorities who hide the failures in the implementation of new legislation.”³⁸ Under the critical gaze of higher authorities, ail authorities were obliged to initiate nomadic girls and women’s classes to educate teachers and midwives; to educate women in health and hygiene related matters; and to fight against mullahs’ and nationalists’ influence over women. The severity of the language in the resolution implied that there were widespread abuses of power at the ail level which had to be rectified. The education of women against nomadism was seen as one of the first steps towards correcting such abuses.

The language of following ail reports reflected the state policy of teaching women that the traditional expressions of their society threatened their gender. According to this

³⁸ “The Resolution of the Third Party Conference in the Kyrgyz Oblast,” Frunze, March 1-8, 1927, 12-26.

discourse, the men of their families forced the women to practice demeaning nomadic traditions that relegated women to a childlike space in their societies, stripping them of real womanhood. A 1927 Party Conference report condemned the following nomadic traditions as they were seen as aspects of a patriarchal and national assault on Kyrgyz women's rights:

The Party must achieve decisive implementation of the Soviet legislation in the region on the battle against *kız ala kachuu*, polygamy, kalyng, inheritance of wives³⁹ and so on. The initiative to fight for the emancipation of women must seize the control from the antagonistic parties and the enemies of Soviet regime such as the mullahs and nationalists so that they do not secure their influence women and the population in general.⁴⁰

Another Party report (1930) on the "Work on the Nomads" suggested that male relatives prevented women from participating in literacy projects of the clubs. The women needed to learn about their equal position under the law:

At the encampments of nomads, only 42 of the liquidation of illiteracy organizations are female. At the Susamyr pasture council, only one Red Yurt is female. There were 26 participants in the female courses. Important work was carried out at the Susamyr pasture on the battle against everyday crimes against women. Conversations on the emancipation of women were conducted, which explained the laws against the practice of kalyng and underage marriage.⁴¹

As women were trapped in a battle between their traditional nomadic communities and the requirements of their modern gender, they were also caught between their government and their families. Illustrating the latter, Central Asians who opposed the

³⁹ Traditional marriage practices among the Kyrgyz allowed the next youngest brother or closest relative to marry the widow of a deceased relative (a tradition called *amangerlik* in Kazakhstan and Northern Kyrgyzstan.) See Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan*, 161.

⁴⁰ "The Resolution of the Third Kyrgyz Oblast Party Conference," Frunze, 1927, 12-16.

⁴¹ "The Report of the Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks VKP of (b) of 6th Regional Party Conference," Frunze, 1930, 192-193 and 129-130.

activities of the Zhenotdel referred to the institution as *jinotdel*.⁴² *Jin*, meaning “bad spirit” in most Central Asian languages, marked the Zhenotdel as the agent of anti-Muslim forces. Most women could not ignore such negative sentiments even if they wanted to participate in the activities of the women’s liberation movement.⁴³

Joining the party or attending lectures at the worker’s clubs was one thing, but appearing in one of the Women’s Day celebrations was another. Women’s family members saw this behavior as confrontational. In fact, with government encouragement, many women accepted the leadership role against their oppressive male dominated societies. For these women, their womanhood represented their personal identity and their weapon.⁴⁴ By taking their private grievances to the public arena women defied tradition, and as a result, they played into the Soviet arrangement of dismantling traditional social and cultural structures of their nomadic past.

Nomadic traditions defined the way all populations responded to revolutionary authorities. Some men refused to allow their wives and daughters to participate in any revolutionary educational activity that required communal interaction. Others had no problem with their women attending but they did not have the means to attend. In order to attend a club meeting, many people had to travel long distances and many of them could not afford to lose the time or the energy. They did not know who would shepherd

⁴² Tadjbakhsh, “Between Lenin and Allah: Women and Ideology in Tajikistan,” 169.

⁴³ Ahmed, “Early Feminist Movements in Turkey and Egypt,” 122. Ahmed coined the phrase “between betrayal and betrayal,” referring to the women of Egypt and Turkey. The difference between the modernizing states of Turkey (and to some extent Egypt) and the Soviet Union was that the modernizing force was indigenous in the former.

⁴⁴ Choi Chatterjee has reported that in 1925 at a Women’s Day activity, an Uzbek woman named Gasikhanova publicly denounced her husband, charging that he had left her sick and pregnant. Chatterjee has argued that women like Gasikhanova “converted a hitherto private matter into an issue of public concern.” See Chatterjee, *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939*, 68-69.

the animals or take care of the children. Even among non-farming nomadic families, daily tasks and duties left very little time for anything else. These issues did not go unnoticed by ail administrators. They never ceased on communicating to higher authorities that these factors were hindering their revolutionary work. This was a “safe” explanation for the obstacles that revolutionary work among women encountered.

Official reports indicate that forcing husbands to “permit” their wives to attend Red Yurt meetings was an act that attacked rules of traditional nomadic authority. It was a deliberate challenge to men’s power over their women. Officials portrayed this policy as a political action that gave women the option of saying “no” to their husbands, yet the officials were the ones who were saying “no” to the husbands. The social and cultural consequences of such revolutionary policy were radical, especially in small settlements.

The authorities were more interested in these radical consequences, paying little attention to the economic problems these revolutionary actions would bring to small communities. To begin to understand these economic problems, it must be appreciated that women, particularly the young, tended herds, thus constituting an essential link in the economic chain of the small communities. Without grazing, herds would not be able to produce milk, meat, wool or other products. This issue would not be seriously addressed until the collectivization drive of the 1930s, until which time Kyrgyz families refused to let go of their traditional labor divisions. Some women went to Red Yurt meetings if the local officials managed to gather them before they took the flocks to the pasture; in other words, they refused to change their lifestyles. As Rakhimov concluded, “villages will not have an energetic population without educated women, who would make good

teachers.”⁴⁵ He and other authorities saw women as initiators of change. The changes in women’s position would only begin to take place during the collectivization drive of the 1930s.

EDUCATING WOMEN

Based on official discourse, the spread of education was easier for women’s clubs and Zhenotdel during collectivization because it was easier to influence the collective farmers. The rules and regulations for the education projects were set up, however, much earlier than the collectivization drive. The Resolution of the Second Party Conference in the Kyrgyz Oblast on November 3, 1925 identified the most important issue: “The center of gravity must be moved from city to ail.” The resolution noted that no transformation in women’s position would be achieved unless the women of the ail improved their economic situations. Small handicrafts, for example, would provide women with long-awaited economic independence. It was also the duty of the women’s clubs and Zhenotdel to grant women cultural independence, particularly from “everyday prejudices.”⁴⁶

The image that official propaganda conveyed was that of groups of rural Kyrgyz women swiftly gaining proletarian consciousness and discussing social and political issues with each other on a regular basis:

In Kyzyl-Kyia, Kyrgyz women as influential workers developed faster than in the women in the neighboring villages. At the Zhenotdel, the local population organized female circles without any obstacles. Three conversations as an introduction took place among them successfully.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶ “The Tasks of the Zhenotdel” in “The Resolution of the Second Party Conference in the Kyrgyz Oblast,” Frunze, November 3, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 10, op. 1, d. 23, l. 13.

⁴⁷ *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (March 2, 1927): 2.

Without a doubt, this official language exaggerated the positive results of club work on women's issues, but this rhetoric became the foundation of Soviet women's sisterhood in Central Asia.⁴⁸ The official rhetoric on the extent of women's freedoms ignored some of the major societal issues. The official documents argued that clubs offered a refuge to women. They also observed that for some women attending a club was a source of contention at home. This revolutionary institution dug a gap between the sexes and brought the ethnic and religious identities of women came under attack.

During the mid to late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, in Kyrgyz ails, women's clubs and the women's branches of other clubs established one ideological goal: "To bring light to women, for which they have been striving for a long time." Clubs also established several practical goals in defense of this overall ambition, including "bringing women together," "serving as a cultural center," "liquidating illiteracy," and "rendering practical assistance to female peasants."⁴⁹ A women's club opened its doors on March 18, 1925 in Taldy Suu of Kurmenty *volost'* (the smallest administrative unit and a remnant of the Tsarist era). This was the first women's club at the ail level in Kyrgyzstan.

According to ail officials, in some geographical pockets where Uzbeks and Kyrgyz lived closely, or certain religious orders left a legacy of orthodox Islam, Kyrgyz men asserted more influence on their female relatives' behavior. In a 1925 report to the

⁴⁸ Karasayeva, "Kadınlar ve Kadın Kuruluşları," 188. Even today's post-Soviet women's organizations such as NGOs (non-governmental organizations) operate in a Soviet Club atmosphere, two-thirds of them defining themselves as the continuation of the Communist predecessors.

⁴⁹ *Batratskaia pravda*, (April 24, 1925) 7, 1. The first issue of *Batratskaia pravda* was published on March 12, 1925. In July 1925, it was renamed *Krest'yanskii put'*. In 1927, it was again renamed *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*. *Kyrgyz Sovetlik Sotsialistik Respublikasy Entsiklopediiasy*, 1983, 280.

oblast administration, a club “organizer” named Gaibdjanov argued that the men did not attend Red Clubs because they worked too hard during the day and the women did not attend because they needed their husbands’ permission. Gaibdjanov asserted that women were interested in the work of Red Yurts, but there were no active female leaders among Uzbeks or Kyrgyz who would unite the community. Moreover, without exposure to the literature on the women’s movement, Gaibdjanov argued, there would not be any female leaders of any ethnicity.⁵⁰

Women’s Clubs attempted to educate women on health, legal and financial issues, the necessary steps for giving the women same rights and opportunities as men.⁵¹ A political education committee manager reported that in 1925 Tong, Türgen, and Tüp districts opened their first women’s branches in Red Yurts to carry out women’s education work. The manager indicated that that these branches were ready to do their work with women as soon as they received “the necessary literature and instructions.”⁵² Evidently, a more fortunate manager received what was necessary for the education project. On August 1, 1925, *Organizator* (manager) A. Rakhimov reported that despite pastoral migration to the mountains in the summer months, the educators reached the villagers. Rakhimov personally organized a Red Yurt gathering in the Tong District. He

⁵⁰ “The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in the Jeti Oguz Raion of Karakol-Naryn Okrug, July 12 to August 25, 1925,” TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, ll. 18.

⁵¹ See the three young women who are learning to read in Figure 30 (page 274).

⁵² The Report of the Manager of Przhevalsk Okrugs Political Education Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous *Oblast* on the Opening of Political Education Establishments, July 22, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 647, op. 1, d. 9, l. 71.

was able to present a better lecture due to the equipment and posters that the regional office sent to him.⁵³

The activities of the women's clubs and the women's branches of other clubs included lectures on Soviet authority and leadership, the purpose of the Red Yurts, and the local climate and hygiene. Rakhimov's report suggests that these lectures were not always well-attended when clubs first opened in 1925 and 1926. According to Rakhimov's report, the organizers in Tong had to bring women to these meetings "by force" (*nasil'no*), because, as the managers informed Rakhimov, many women could not go to the meetings without the permission of their husbands. Although the official documents do not explicitly describe the type of "force" applied, Rakhimov's report indicates that ail organizers went from house to house to gather women to attend the meetings. It seems that it was the male relatives of women, not the women themselves, who were forced to obey the rules.

The large majority of adult women's cultural education began at the ail level, in clubs. Ail reports and newspaper articles of the 1920s indicate that the improvement of women's attendance and their education in clubs were two primary issues for the managers. *Batratskaia pravda* reported that an ail club organized a conference of Kara-Kyrgyz girls to begin training them for higher education. Nine schools in the area altered their programs to include girls and women of many ages in literacy programs:

In 1914, most of the young girls did not attend schools. The European girls made up approximately twenty percent of the total student population. There were a little more than 700 European girls among 3,500

⁵³ "The Report of the Organizer of Red Yurts in the Jeti Oguz Region of Karakol-Naryn Okrug," July 12 to August 25, 1925, TsGAKSSR, f. 651, op. 1, d. 95, l. 18.

students. [Note: these numbers are approximate since exact information is missing.]

In the last two years, a few educational institutions were opened in Kirghizia, which involved the women of local population. Since 1927, Women's Clubs began working. At the present, there are five active clubs, and at the end of 1929 there will be ten Women's Red Yurts operating. One-hundred and seven women (47 indigenous women) were sent to the secondary educational institutions in the 1928-29 academic year outside of Kirghizia.⁵⁴

The newspaper singled out the Naryn region and criticized the District Party Committee for neglecting women's and girls' education projects. It suggested that without their support, women's clubs could not open the proposed "Medical Consultation Center."⁵⁵ The article emphasized the education of women as a primary goal. The discrepancy between the attendance of European (such as Russian, German, and Ukrainian) and Kara-Kyrgyz girls was still a problem in 1929.

When the newspaper *Batratskaia pravda* set out to convey the "achievements of cultural work among women," it reported that cultural work among the women of Kara Kol "moved slowly forward" and encountered difficulties among the women of Naryn oblast. The article reiterated that "cultural work in Naryn lacked interested activists." It reported that the first "Kara Kyrgyz" (later called Kyrgyz) women's club in Taldy Suu encampment hoped to open a medical consultation center, an *artel*, and other facilities. About 52 members of the club were placed in various political offices. According to the article, however, the women were absent from the legal education workshops that trained 25 men per day. The article further suggested that officials have "thrown away the funds

⁵⁴ "The Report of the Inspector of Female Training at the National Commissar of Education of the Central Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on the activities, regarding women," April 4, 1929, TsGAKSSR, f. 688, op. 1, d. 229, ll. 22-24.

⁵⁵ For the Soviet policies of medical education in Kazakhstan, see Michaels, *Curative Powers*.

and resources,” leaving young women helpless. It summed up this desperate situation with one final sentence: “Our women have been striving for light for a long time, but there is nobody to help them.”⁵⁶ This article exemplifies how the state viewed Kyrgyz women: ignorant, helpless, and neglected. The official rhetoric implied that male-dominated, Muslim and nomadic Kyrgyz society was responsible for women’s inferior status.

Educating girls to reject the status of inferiority would prove to be complicated, however, during the “dekulakization” era, when the Central Committee understood that expulsion of the kulak children would be counterproductive to the universal education campaign.⁵⁷ Especially in sparsely populated regions, schools could not afford to dismiss any children. Many female teachers were involved in the recruitment of young Kyrgyz boys and girls as pioneers and Komsomol members. Some teachers served as the practitioners of Soviet power, while others believed in the bright future that all types of education would bring to their people.

During my interviews with Sabira Kümüşaliyeva in July 2002, it became obvious that an ideological reality of her time contributed to her own self-image: she was the daughter of a kulak, a wealthy bourgeois, hence an enemy of the Soviet people. In other words, she identified herself with Bolshevik terminology (kulak), and she still “spoke Bolshevik although it portrayed her family negatively:” “When I was fourteen years old, they expelled me from the tekhnikum (vocational school) as a daughter of a

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ E. Thomas Ewing has demonstrated that the Central Committee recognized “mass education as a way to reintegrate children of ‘class aliens’ into the dominant system.” Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s*, 63.

kulak. My ancestors were very rich people.” She proudly remarked that her father owned a *bozüi* that contained more than ten *kanat* (wing) or portable side panels that make a *bozüi*.

Kümüşhaliyeva, like the other children of kulaks, was not only marked for life, but also often deprived of education. Kulak children were separated from other children in the schools: “After I was expelled, there was nothing for me to do. So, one of my aunts took me to School Number Five where she was a teacher. I became a first and second grade teacher.”⁵⁸ Kümüşhaliyeva began her teaching career as a teenager, barely older than some of her students. She remarked that “I was proud of participating in my people’s education.”

Her interpretation of her fortunes and misfortunes in her early childhood paralleled her affirmative narrative of the drastic changes that took place in the 1920s and 1930s. She claimed that Soviet government never meant to “harm Kyrgyz traditions.” Her argument indicated that she believed Kyrgyzzness survived and even flourished during her lifetime. She believed that Soviet policies in arts helped frame Kyrgyzzness in a “contemporary fashion.”

Regardless of all the economic and ideological complexities, this was the period of “the Campaign for Universal Education.” In July 1930, the Central Committee in Moscow made it mandatory for all Soviet children between the ages eight and eleven to enroll in school. In rural areas and remote villages, there was a severe shortage of teachers. Even if many families were suspicious of the State’s intentions during the 1920s, they gradually gave in and began sending their children to school. In the 1930s,

⁵⁸ Interview with Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, Bishkek: July 19, 2002.

people's resistance to schooling all but disappeared. Most people recognized the status and opportunities that education brought to young people. In economically desperate regions, people began to see education as the only chance for their children to compete for better positions in the Soviet system. Kyrgyz parents accepted, perhaps begrudgingly, the value and status that education brought.⁵⁹ Most importantly, once they realized that the Soviet system was there to stay, they believed that education was necessary for them to find their way in the system.

Many Kyrgyz teachers and other intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s followed the official script and advocated elevating indigenous women's social standing among all nationalities by way of education and employment. They, however, insisted on preserving indigenous Kyrgyz traditions. Chingiz Aitmatov echoed the sentiments of these intellectuals in the 1950s when he stuck close to the 1930s primary goal regarding Kyrgyz women: they needed to be rescued from the unfair and unequal requirements of their traditional societies. Such a drastic goal and the subsequent actions of the state representatives created both revolutionizing and sometimes devastating results in Kyrgyz society. The nuances of Aitmatov's narrative made indigenous traditions as important as ideological issues. In this way, Aitmatov crafted a narrative that blurred the lines between the state ideology and indigenous values, forging a powerful image that values both Kyrgyz tradition and Soviet ideology.

Since the Bolshevik Revolution, the conservatives of Kyrgyz society, namely the mullahs, had largely been purged, either ideologically subjugated or physically

⁵⁹ Compare with Yuri Slezkine, "From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938," 71-76. Slezkine has shown that in Siberia people's initial hostility to compulsory education disappeared in the 1930s.

liquidated. Without the pressures of these conservative elements in the society, entirely new venues outside the household opened their doors to Central Asian women. Soviet policy-makers encouraged Central Asian women to move into the working world and take part in changing their societies, and as a result, many women assumed important positions in fields of education, health, and the arts.⁶⁰ At various times during the Soviet period, Kyrgyz women succeeded in holding twenty to thirty percent of public positions.⁶¹

The Soviet system, however, prevented non-Russian women from reaching the highest positions in the regime. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) gradually closed the doors of the higher offices even to Russian women like Aleksandra Kollontai, and the other founders of Soviet women's liberation movement.⁶² They were confined to the social and cultural service related fields such as education, health, and arts.

Only a handful of Central Asian women moved into important positions in the Soviet administration.⁶³ Women who were not allowed to work in political offices directed their creative energies to other arenas, working as teachers, doctors, nurses, artists and actresses. Yadgar S. Nasriddinova of the Uzbek SSR (born 1920) was one of

⁶⁰ For gender issues in Central Asia, see the following studies: Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan*; Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*; Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*; and Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia*.

⁶¹ *Kyrgyz Sovettik Sotsialistik Respublikasy Entsiklopediiasy*: 149-150, 181 and 479-483; and Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*: 254-255.

⁶² Barbara Evans Clements has pointed out that at the end of the Second World War, *Bolshevichki* (Bolshevik women) were reduced to less important positions in the Party. Clemens, *Bolshevik Women*: 231-293.

⁶³ Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh has argued that in the Tajik case, because of indigenous societal pressures on women and the ignorance of the Soviet administrators regarding Muslim societies, women never attained genuinely influential positions in the CPSU. Tadjbakhsh, "Between Lenin and Allah: Women and Ideology in Tajikistan," 164.

the exceptions. Although her successful career reached its apex after the scope of this study, Nasriddinova left her mark on Soviet history as one of the few Central Asian women to work as the Chairwoman of the Council of Nationalities.⁶⁴

Making Heroes Among Women

The discourse in the official documents indicates that the authorities counted on women to be thankful and publicly demonstrate their appreciation of the state for saving them. In the late 1930s, newly educated and trained women, contemporaries of Sabira Kümüşaliyeva, wrote to the newspapers and journals that they were indebted to the Party for their successes. An “Honored Actress,” Kanymkül Aibasheva (1901-1940), wrote:

I am happy that I am going to Moscow. It is a great honor trusted upon me to show the revived folk art of my country in the capital of our Socialist native land. To become an actor was my dream that seemed unrealizable in dark times of the tsars when my country was captured and oppressed. Now, it has become possible and real. The day that I see much loved Stalin will be the happiest day of my life.⁶⁵

Aibasheva’s expression of her appreciation was also emblematic of how the non-Russian nationalities responded to the Soviet state, specifically at the end of 1930s. By publicly declaring her “love” for Stalin, Aibasheva was exhibiting herself as a good Soviet citizen. As Jeffrey Brooks has pointed out, performers like Aibasheva “who publicly thanked Stalin validated personal ties to the leader.”⁶⁶ But, Aibasheva was doing more than that: she was forging an image of self that represented her warm, hospitable, and friendly

⁶⁴ Between 1940 and 1970s, Nasriddinova moved up the political ladder to become a member of the Central Committee of CPSU, serving as the chairwoman of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek SSR from 1959 to 1970, and as the chairwoman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Council of USSR from 1970 to 1974. See Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 310-11.

⁶⁵ Aibasheva, “An Examination of Creative Maturity,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (May 11, 1939): 3.

⁶⁶ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*, 86.

Kyrgyz culture. In other words, Aibasheva was “acting out” her Kyrgyzness and fulfilling the role that her nation assigned to her.⁶⁷ She was going to represent the Kyrgyz in front of Stalin and pass on to him her people’s gratitude.

Beginning in 1936, non-Russian nationalities were invited to Moscow to present their national cultures in *dekady* (ten-day Festivals). In return, the national performers received awards, diplomas, and medals in what Jeffrey Brooks referred to as “asymmetric reciprocity.” Brooks noted that the nationalities tried to outdo each other in their public declaration of appreciation, but only received token awards for their efforts.⁶⁸ The discourse of flattery in the local newspaper and official reports on the *dekady* speeches implied that the nationalities could not sufficiently reciprocate all that the Soviet government had done for them. Aibasheva was on her way to the first Kyrgyz *dekada* in Moscow. She wanted to join in the many voices that competed with each other in flattering the Party. It is impossible to know how genuine Aibasheva was in showing her appreciation, but it is not difficult to imagine that she was one of many women who broke out of the limited life of a wife and a mother in a mountain village, and considered the Party responsible for that.

Officials never gave up reminding Kyrgyz women that they had found new freedoms. Aibasheva’s public display of flattery of the state indicated, however, that she, like many Kyrgyz performers learned to “speak Bolshevik.”⁶⁹ As Stephen Kotkin has

⁶⁷ Kamp, “Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s,” 264. Marianne Kamp explores the concept of performing one’s national identity when discussing the public displays of Uzbek women unveiling. Kamp draws upon Judith Butler’s argument that gender identification is “performative.” For the concept of gender performativity see Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

⁶⁸ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 96.

⁶⁹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 220-223.

described, Soviet citizens learned that open demonstrations of political activism would be rewarded in many ways; “speaking Bolshevik” was one of the techniques that people learned to demonstrate. Stalinism moved Kyrgyz women, like Aibasheva, who matured in the late 1930s, from objects of change to participants in cultural revolution.

Chingiz Aitmatov’s early work engendered fictional female characters which established revolutionary women as heroic Kyrgyz prototypes. These women all knew how to “speak Bolshevik” without forgetting to add their Kyrgyz twist to this language. According to his work and biographies, the women in Aitmatov’s life and fiction provide powerful representations of how Kyrgyz women fashioned Soviet Kyrgyzness. Aitmatov constructed Kyrgyz women characters in his early fiction who symbolized the positive images of cultural change in Central Asia. Aitmatov’s leading women came across as strong and loyal, both to the revolution and to their native culture. The images in Aitmatov’s writings portrayed women as products of a period wrought with change. The same discourse provided the readers, especially young Kyrgyz and other Soviet women, with role models.

Aitmatov wrote about the effects of social and cultural change in personal and emotional ways rather than focusing on the political events. He told the stories of women learning from the new Soviet system and changing their lives accordingly. Although the contention that Aitmatov’s characters transformed their identities was unconvincing, he did tap the emotional expressions of his women.⁷⁰ His traditional women were emotionally attached to their past. Their emotions took on a life of their own and should not be dismissed as simple manipulation of the readers’ emotions. He drew out subtle

⁷⁰ Mozur, Jr., *Parables from the Past: The Prose Fiction of Chingiz Aitmatov*, 27.

negotiations between women, her society and the state, which his women both cooperated with and resisted.

Aitmatov, who began to publish short stories in 1954, reflected upon his own childhood experiences with his female relatives. A close look at women in Aitmatov's early work reveals that the women in his short stories and novellas are materials to examine all women's education during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Soviet ideology required the construction of Soviet female role models who would rescue themselves from the clutches of the patriarchal Muslim traditions of villages and ails.

In 1972, Aitmatov attributed his knowledge of his own Kyrgyz culture to the women of his early childhood:

I heard these things mainly from my paternal grandmother, Aiyman Satan-kyzy, and her daughter, my aunt, Karagyz Aitmatova. It is amazing how similar a mother and daughter can be in appearance, personality and spiritual makeup. To me they were one and the same person –an older and younger grandmother all in one. I am thankful that I knew these wonderful women who were wise and beautiful –they really were beautiful. They were the ones who taught me about the old days and our family history.⁷¹

On November 8, 1938, the Soviet state arrested Aitmatov's father Törökul and later murdered him along with 136 other "enemies of the people." In Aitmatov's memory, women become influential figures in his life; in his early stories and novellas, women served as the building blocks of Kyrgyz culture. Distant or absent male figures, often the victims of the Stalinist system, left a void in Aitmatov's life that female kin amply filled. His grandfather Aitmat died before he was born. He stressed, in an interview, that his

⁷¹ Aitmatov, *The Time to Speak Out*, 21.

father “did not live long enough to get around to” teaching him about his ancestors and culture. “Besides, Aitmatov noted, he had other more important things to do.”⁷²

Aitmatov’s female relatives, his personal heroes, picked up the pieces after the brutal purges were over. He claimed that they taught him the meaning of being Kyrgyz. In his youth, his grandmother Aiymkan took the young Aitmatov on the traditional summer migrations on the high mountain pastures. He spent the summer months with her, far away from the capital city Frunze, in his native ail Sheker. During his later years, Aitmatov’s aunt Karagyz continued the cultural mentor role. It was his grandmother and aunt, not his grandfather and father, who helped him understand and later define the dichotomous culture of Kyrgyzstan: being Soviet in Kyrgyzstan meant something new, but also sorrowful. It meant a loss of native culture and nature.

It is sometimes difficult to separate the fictional and real heroes in Aitmatov’s life, especially for a reader of both his biographical accounts and his fiction. As he himself confessed, he drew on the “real” women of his youth –or at least his vision of them in depicting women in his short stories and novellas. In effect, he constructed gender roles and female heroes based on his own experience with women in his childhood. In addition, in realist fashion, his fictional world attempts to reflect the “real” world of both pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyz societies. His women are full participants in the social and cultural revolution that occurs in the early to mid-twentieth century Kyrgyzstan. Some are the depictions of the old generation who belonged to the

⁷² Ibid., 21.

patriarchy, and the others are the New Soviet Women.⁷³ They represent both undesired “backwards” elements and the “revolutionized” success story.

As he became critical of the Stalinist system, his fictional women express this critique or suffer the effects of the Stalinist crimes. Aitmatov addresses both of these issues in his work. His images of Soviet women in Kyrgyzstan include their sadness along with their excitement. They are sad about losing valuable traditions but excited about the progress that the Soviet system promises them.

Aitmatov’s women, both real and fictional, are conveyors of wisdom imbedded in Kyrgyz culture. They utilize everyday “folk wisdom” in dealing with cultural and social change that the Soviet system brings to them. In his own words: “I always have the epos in mind. It is a multi-layered and multi-faceted creation of folk wisdom. But I do not simply include an epos in my stories; I try to use it in an assimilated form.”⁷⁴ By bringing out the sentiments of these women, Aitmatov reminds his readers the time-honored codes of conduct in Kyrgyz culture. In effect, Aitmatov uses these women to educate his readers on the values of their traditional culture. Even if certain transformations of his characters come across as unconvincing, Aitmatov self-consciously presents models, albeit clichés, for emulation.

Aitmatov sees Kyrgyz women as purveyors of tradition. Two women of different generations appear the same to him. His account of reality already embodies the collapse of the old and the new. For Aitmatov, women make history and keep history alive. He respects heroic women and has empathy for the villainous ones. His grandmother and the

⁷³ Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, 75-6.

⁷⁴ Aitmatov, *The Time to Speak Out*, 64.

traditional women of his tales are intertwined; his aunt, who openly and fearlessly cursed the Stalinist regime and the tough young women are enmeshed.

Ironically, the representations of women in Aitmatov's early fiction become models for reality. He created ideal models for Soviet girls and women. Stories like Aitmatov's were and still are required readings for children at school. Thus, at a young age, real girls begin learning about the fictional ones as role models. Although Aitmatov's writings did not take place until the 1950s and 1960s, the stories they told provided enduring images of the cultural revolution. His works helped forge the official Soviet narrative of heroism that club administrators were attempting to create. In essence, Aitmatov's work wrote a history of cultural revolution in Kyrgyzstan that often echoed the official discourse of club documents.

Like Aitmatov's heroines, real women could accomplish something significant outside of their homes.⁷⁵ Following in the footsteps of the 1930s shock-workers and Stakhanovites, many young women aspired to be exemplary Soviet citizens.⁷⁶ Ail documents and newspapers presented Kyrgyz Stakhanovites as role-models and heroines. According to official records, "more than the ten-thousand women of Kyrgyzstan were awarded orders and medals of the USSR for the successes they achieved in all branches of national economy, and seventy women were awarded the highest rank of the Hero of Socialist Labor." In the 1930s, a well-known beet grower by the name of Zuurakan

⁷⁵ Lapidus, "Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change," 220.

⁷⁶ Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 29.

Kainazarova received this award twice.⁷⁷ At age seventy, reflecting upon those years,

Kainazarova wrote:

I will be seventy soon. I know a thing or two about the deprived Kyrgyz woman's civil rights before the revolution. I also know well what it means to serve the rich with physical work. I have gone through that humiliation. It was disgusting. When I was a fifteen-year girl, I was sold in marriage to a rich old man. However, my life has been changed. I have received the most supreme award on earth: Lenin's Order, and a gold medal of the Hero of Socialist Labor. I have been serving my country as a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for seventeen years.⁷⁸

In turn, newspapers and official documents sang her praises and entered her name as a Soviet heroine in encyclopedias. Three decades later, D. Akimaliyev, the First Secretary of Sokuluk Regional Committee of Communist Party, wrote about her:

Zuurakan Kainazarova made a big contribution to the development of the Stakhanovite movement in our republic. She built the foundation of the development of the sugar beet agriculture in the Chui Valley. She has become a political leader, deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. She has become a Hero of Socialist Labor twice but she was a poor peasant before. Kainazarova, a fiery patriot, has become a good example in all factories of the Chui Valley. Collective farmers were convinced because of her intelligent speeches to join the shock worker movement. She educated hundreds of girls, among them other Heroes of Socialist Labor, Natal'ia Illarionovna Vorob'eva, and Kerimbübü Shopokova. She also sheltered and brought up five orphans during the prewar years and the Great Patriotic War, including Zoia, a Russian girl. Zuurakan Kainazarova has been a communist since 1939. She is an example who shows how to serve the party and the people.⁷⁹

According to the official script, Kainazarova embodied young Kyrgyz women who could shape their own destinies, despite the obligations of their traditional family and

⁷⁷ Tatybekova, *Kyrgyz Sovettik Sotsialistik Respublikasy Entsiklopediiasy*, 148-9.

⁷⁸ "Generous Destiny," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (November 5, 1969): 2.

⁷⁹ "A Glorious Daughter of Kyrgyz Nation," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (May 16, 1972): 3.

community.⁸⁰ First secretary Akimaliyev's praises dutifully referred to all the key components that make a Soviet hero: moving from poverty to leadership, serving the country as a free woman, and nurturing all Soviet nationalities.

This rhetoric and women's participation in official propaganda helped fashion Soviet women's Kyrgyzzness. The story of one more exemplary hero summarizes how Soviet Kyrgyzzness was created in women's images:

Poets composed verses about Ölmöskhan Atabekova. Her life has inspired writer Nasirdin Baitemirov to write the novel called *Jyldyzkhan* (Female Star). She has been awarded the Hero of Socialist Work in Lenin district. Ölmöskhan *eje* (older sister), a member of the All-Union Council of the sovkhos, and the supervisor of the advanced cotton-growing brigade in Frunze Kolkhoz has been elected as a delegate for the Twenty-fourth Congress of the Party.⁸¹

Writer Nasirdin Baitemirov depicted Atabekova's early heroism in his novel by showing how she broke down the social and cultural boundaries:

So I also say, the old man continued, let Ölmöskhan lead our kolkhoz. We know her talents since she was a little girl. Think about it: no one fulfilled last year's plan, but only the brigade of Ölmöskhan produced even more cotton than the plan required. The club hall buzzed. A woman as a chairperson! It means that she will supervise young men! Someone's malicious voice was heard: Do burn down my beard now!⁸²

According to *Literaturnyi Kirgizstan*, Ölmöskhan represented everything that was exemplary about a Kyrgyz woman who became a cultural revolutionary. The author of the article, V. Nikulin, wrote that Ölmöskhan was born a nomad but grew up in a sedentarized village. Her father became a skilled peasant, who taught her the nature and value of the earth since she was a child. In seventh-grade she became a brigadier,

⁸⁰ See Zuurakan Kainazarova (Figure 31) on page 275.

⁸¹ "The Field Calls," *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (April 2, 1971): 3. See Baitemirov, *Erigen Tash, Kylymdar Demi*, and *Erigen Tash: Yrlar zhana Poemalar, Makhabat, Elim, Zherim, Ata-tegim*.

⁸² "A Daughter of the Soil," *Literaturnyi Kirgizstan*, (April 2, 1971): 24

moving up to the leadership position in her brigade within a year. They named her “the true daughter of the soil.” They said that she protected Kyrgyz agriculture. In Ölmöskhan Atabekova’s person the official narrative portrayed the perfect national hero of Kyrgyz SSR. She was the protector of the soil, akin to Umai Ene, the mythical Kyrgyz protector of the earth. The narrative portrayed Kyrgyzzness wrapped in a Soviet cloak.

WOMEN PERFORM KYRGYZNESS

The women of Kyrgyzstan such as actress Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva and her three girl friends from Tököldösh were expected to exhibit their club education in public celebrations and on theater stages. On the stage and at the Olympiads in Central Asia, the issue of women’s participation was of central importance. Soviet administrators always emphasized women’s participation in public cultural events and argued that women’s participation in arts and celebrations meant that socialism and democracy was beginning to take hold in Kyrgyz society.

Ethnic ideas of gender and religion created complex and potentially alienating attitudes toward the public performance of women. Islam’s stance on women on the stage offered no compromise and women’s presence in the theater caused a problem in Uzbek, Tajik and Uygur regions where Islam was stricter. The authorities had been actively pushing for unveiling since 1927, but putting women on the stage was another matter. Comrade Akisdov, the Artistic Director of Jalal Abad Theater, complained:

It is very difficult to work in Jalal Abad. There are religious vestiges still today. Recently, a talented actress Inovotkhan has been accepted to the theater. Once, following a performance, her parents waited for her on the street. They wanted to kill her, because she rejected Muslim principles

and became an actress. Consequently, she could not work here and left for Kokand.⁸³

The religiously observant societies did not hesitate to resist what they saw as an attack on their religion. Women in theater stood out as one of the most blatant violations of their principles. In general in Central Asia, cultural and religious attitudes presented serious barriers to women's positions in entertainment, although not always as extreme as the experience of Inovatkhan. Miyassar Razzakova talked about her mother's experience which was typical in Uzbekistan and southern Kyrgyzstan:

I can tell you about my mother. She was a very gifted person. If, in her time, she had received a good education, she would have achieved much. Compelled to conform to a women's traditional role subordinate and dependent for everything upon her husband and mother-in-law—she nevertheless sought to pass on her dreams to her children and live through them. There she was, a mother of ten children, living in a *mahalla* in which the prestige of European operas was not high, to put it plainly. And yet she detected in me an innate aptitude and in order to guide my future, she took me, a sixteen-year-old girl, to recitals at the conservatory. It must have been rare for an Uzbek mother to take this step because there was prejudice against performing arts such as the theater and especially opera. These were regarded as purely European arts and even more so in the traditional Muslim environment. The career of an actress was not exactly considered the best for one's daughter.⁸⁴

Razzakova's mother's experience was common in Central Asia, where many societies prohibited women from entering the arts. The burden of prejudice varied among ethnic groups and regional communities. In Kyrgyzstan, there were exceptional modern girls such as Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva who emerged as powerful figures in Kyrgyz performing arts.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., 87.

⁸⁴ Tokhtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova, *The Daughters of Amazons*, 76.

⁸⁵ Barlow et al., "The Modern Girl Around the World: A Research Agenda and Preliminary Findings."

Kyrgyz theater actress Sabira Kümüşaliyeva might be seen as the prototype for the modern Kyrgyz girl and woman. Women like Kümüşaliyeva made a decisive impact upon the establishment of a new culture in Soviet Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁶ Her coming of age as an actress and a Soviet woman coincided with the apex of Stalinism. She began working in theater in the early 1930s and quickly became one of the resident actresses in the Kyrgyz Drama Theater. She personified the successful national hero in that she came from nowhere and rose to become both a professional Soviet woman and a symbolic national heroine.⁸⁷

Kyrgyz women who came of age during the 1930s forged several layers of identity. These layers came from outside influences, shaping women like Sabira Kümüşaliyeva as a Soviet citizen, a communist who supposedly belonged to an international brotherhood, but at the same time was the daughter of a condemned rich man. Young Kümüşaliyeva grew up within a troubled economic climate. Yet, the very ideas of international communism and the brotherhood of the proletariat were foreign to her family. These were the times when the Soviet state and its indigenous agents turned their attention to Kyrgyz girls and women whom they viewed “downtrodden, oppressed, and hidden.” In the eyes of the Soviets, women’s liberation depended on their westernization. In this context, Slavic cultural influence represented the “West.” The young Kümüşaliyeva and her girlfriends also saw their future in these western-oriented

⁸⁶ Kyrgyz theater and film star Sabira Kümüşaliyeva has been called “the Queen of the Stage.” See, Bezborodova and Tuzov, “Koroleva Stseni.”

⁸⁷ *Kyrgyz Sovettik Sotsialistik Respublikasy Entsiklopediiasy*, 1983, 411-423. Recognized by the Soviet state as a national treasure, Kümüşaliyeva was awarded the title National Hero by the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic in 2000.

changes. The brief moments between hours tending sheep and goats that they could find to dedicate to reading and writing were precious to them.

Kümüşhaliyeva claimed that when she was growing up, many Kyrgyz girls envied the physical appearance of Russian girls. They wanted to emulate the clothes, hair styles, and the body language of these “western” girls. The discourse in the classroom and in their schoolbooks constantly reminded them that western appearance meant progress. Their Russian, Ukrainian, German, and even Tatar teachers represented sophisticated and educated women to them. They were the models to look up to. But, at the same time, the Kyrgyz girls wanted to maintain their “unique national identity.” The official discourse kept educating them in the Russian language and culture, and with national cultures as the state policies of the 1930s began to gradually elevate non-Russian national folklores to equal status with that of Russian. The Slavic or other western women’s images often conflicted with the images that their cultures’ folklore provided. Dildora Alimbekova, an Uzbek economist, illustrated this dichotomy well: “My grandmother studied at a Russian gymnasium... We still have her ball gowns... Even though she was not grandfather’s only wife, she considered herself happy.”⁸⁸ Her grandmother was “western” in her education and clothing, but “Uzbek” by virtue of her marriage.

Gulnara Abdrasilova, a Kazakh teacher, referred to the respect for women inherent in nomadic cultures to highlight the merger of “unique national cultures and the gifts of socialism”:

My grandmother on my father’s side is considered the head of the family line ... She resolved disputes between relatives ... She is invited to all community councils ... Similarly, at festivals, memorial services, and such

⁸⁸ Tokhtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova, *The Daughters of Amazons*, 77.

gatherings, she participates side by side with men and sits at the chief table or in the special tent ... The policies of emancipation gave women greater opportunities for education ... While earlier, Kazakh women's talents were manifested through handicrafts, now their sphere of activity is impressive ... many of our well-known opera singers are girls from the village. Could it be possible, at the start of the century, to predict that Kazakh women would be singers who would sing on European stages?⁸⁹

Finally, Kurolai Ibrahimova, a Kazakh scholar, summarizes the conflicting sentiments of many Central Asian women regarding their modern communities:

It was precisely the policies of women's emancipation that led to the homogenization of the national character of women. We lost a lot due to the fact that we had to prove that we were just like the Russian women. From this stem the attempts to copy them in appearances, their crudeness and even shamelessness.⁹⁰

In terms of participation in Soviet society, the tension between modern and traditional put Central Asian women at a disadvantage in comparison to the women from the western regions. Even if they were settled and urbanized, they had to battle against Islamic and other traditions and linguistic adversity. Unlike a Russian woman from a provincial background who moved to the capital and became an actress, Kümüshaliyeva's identity was shaped by other complexities. Her identity enveloped a nomad who became sedentary; a Muslim girl who was liberated from the clutches of religious oppression; a teenager who became a communist who belonged to a larger international entity; and a schoolgirl who was labeled as the daughter of a kulak. As these layers helped to form her identity as a new Soviet woman, so it was that even more complex layers managed to turn her into a modern woman and actress.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 92.

These Kyrgyz girls, who became part of the Soviet elite, learned early on to mold their Kyrgyz past into their new Soviet communities. In the meantime, however, according to Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva they “lived through extreme economic hardships to maintain their dignity.” Her brief stint as a teacher and her first experience with theater occurred in 1931, when she was fourteen years of age. It was at this time that she was discovered by an influential theater director, visiting her ail, and went onto become a “Soviet Hero.” Ironically, Kümüşhaliyeva discovered the promise for a better life in the capital city and in theater while her people were enduring one of the worst experiences of the Soviet Union. Stalin’s policy of collectivization had already begun in 1930. Ail administrators forced the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz to gather their livestock in collective barns. Many of the Kazakhs resisted and slaughtered their animals rather than handing them over to the state administrators. This behavior resulted in costly consequences for the Kazakhs: almost half of the population, an estimated four million people either perished from starvation or fled the country. Young Kümüşhaliyeva experienced the trauma of the Kazakhs first hand.

It was 1934, the year of starvation. Kazakhs were suffering a lot at this time. Maldybaev, a great actor, and his wife came and asked, ‘Can you gather all your children? We are in a hurry; we will give them a concert and leave.’ They gave free concerts at that time. So, they gave their concert. After the concert we fried some corn and served them with some tea. (Now, of course, they have vodka.) After having tea, they started singing. Everybody sang. They asked me to sing. I sang one song. They asked me to sing more. I sang another one. ‘You have a nice voice, why are you teaching? Come to the theater,’ they said. I said, ‘What if they expel me as a daughter of a kulak?’ ‘No, nobody will expel you’ they said.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Interview with Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, July 19, 2002.

Inspired by this encounter, Kümüşhaliyeva braved her way to the capital to break into the world of art and culture. In the capital, Kümüşhaliyeva's identity as a recently urbanized rural girl merged into her stage persona as a Soviet actress. She was exposed to the non-Kyrgyz population of the capital and honed her art under the tutelage of non-Kyrgyz directors and producers who learned their craft from westward-looking masters in Russia.

Kümüşhaliyeva's persona as an actress was shaped by her youth, her ethnicity, and her admiration for "liberated" and strong actresses, both Kyrgyz and foreign. Women like Kümüşhaliyeva were symbols of culturedness. She was an enthusiastic overachiever who wanted to prove to the rest of the Central Asian women that a young and a tiny Kyrgyz girl like herself was capable of changing the world for them. She wanted to say to the girls that they represented change and prosperity by rejecting their male-dominated and old-world traditions. This could only be done by opening up to the embracing aspects of the outside world, such as western theater.

Kümüşhaliyeva retrospectively suggested that during the Stalinist purges, she, like many of her colleagues, developed an inner resolve. She argued that as a result, she emerged from these experiences an extremely patriotic woman even more in touch with her own Soviet Kyrgyz culture. In the late 1930s, she traveled the country with six other actors in order to keep the collective farmers' spirits up. During these pre-war years, one of the administrators of the Kyrgyz National Theater approached Kümüşhaliyeva and her fellow actors:

People are forgetting how to smile. Everybody is sad. We need to send you to the collective farms to entertain them. Who is willing to go?"

Seven of us went from one village to another. At that time, we saw what starvation was. I am 88 years old now, and I have worked for 68 years. We experienced lots of difficulties, but never saw such suffering.⁹²

Official discourse on Soviet Kyrgyzness, both in Aitmatov's short stories and club documents, reflected martyrdom and heroism of the mid to late 1930s. This rhetoric used the reciprocal relationship between Kyrgyz women and Soviet nationality policies. The official rhetoric claimed that the Party gave Kyrgyz women their newly found liberation and freedoms. In turn, the propaganda constantly conveyed to Kyrgyz women that they needed to help the Party disseminate socialist ideology. The official language of the Party dictated that state created the modern Kyrgyz nation with women's help. Women learned to "speak Bolshevik" with a Kyrgyz accent, namely by incorporating their nationality into the "so-called fusion of nationalities." Kyrgyz and Uzbek women learned to construct private lives around the kitchen tables, small family units, and circles of girlfriends that protected their religious and ethnic traditions. Gradually, they enabled each other to participate in more public Soviet institutions without harming their sacred (and often secret) private lives. They secretly preserved religious and ethnic traditions as they preserved their indigenous languages sitting down in a circle around a *dastarkhan*⁹³ for tea, which they showed to the outside world simply as individual family habits.⁹⁴ They constructed an identity that fused many aspects of their community with Soviet practices in order to respond to the demands of their own society and the state.

⁹² Interview with Sabira Kümüşhaliev, July 19, 2002.

⁹³ Dastarkhan is a traditional cloth that is spread on the floor for meals. With the advent of modernity in Kyrgyz and Uzbek homes and the arrival of high tables and chairs, it came to mean "table cloth."

⁹⁴ Nayereh Tohidi has demonstrated in the context of Azeri women, the Muslim women of the Soviet Union managed to "manipulate gender issues for their interests." See, Tohidi, "Guardians of the Nation": Women, Islam, and the Soviet Legacy of Modernization in Azerbaijan," 138.

Kyrgyzzness— due in fact to no small participation on the part of Kyrgyz women — was an amalgamation of Soviet ideals, indigenous traditions, and communities, fused with native myths and epic stories. Strong women of the nomadic past melded into idealized Soviet women —women who stood up against the oppression of religious traditions and patriarchy. Women such as the actresses discussed in this chapter helped perform Kyrgyzzness, an identity that was enhanced with fictional elements. For example, *Manas*'s wife *Kanykei*, a strong and authoritative female figure, began to appear frequently on the stage.⁹⁵ The strength and indomitable spirit of actresses such as Kümüshaliyeva made it possible for actors to become an integral force in creating the national narrative for Kyrgyzstan. One of the “four daughters of Tököldösh,” Darkül Küiükova remembered an incident:

There was a field camp in Ysyk Köl. The inhabitants of the neighboring ails, agriculturists, shepherds had gathered there for an evening performance of Chingiz Aitmatov's *Mother Earth*. After the play, actors had changed their clothes and removed their make-up. A group of spectators had gathered by the tent. A gray-haired aksakal expressed his desire to talk to me, the leading actress:

“Thank you, Darkül, thanks you daughter.”

“You're welcome father, it is my job.”

“Yes, but a job done well is done meaningfully. “

“Thank you too, father.”

Following a short pause, the aksakal asked Küiükova:

“Do you know *Manas*, Darkül?”

“I do.”

“Do you remember *Kanykei*?”

“I do.”

“Well, I thought that there is no one like *Kanykei*. But when I watched the image of Tolgonai you created, I said that she is the same as *Kanykei*.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ The post-Stalin era made it possible for such suspect materials as national epics to be seen as acceptable topics for production onstage. For more, see Brudnyi, *Iz istorii russko-kirgizskoy literaturnykh i teatral'nykh svyazei*, 129-144.

⁹⁶ Lippe. “Image, Actress, Time,” *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia*, (December 27, 1966): 4.

According to Darkül Kiiükova's story, the aksakal acknowledged that powerful and familiar folk heroines like Kanykei found an expression in Soviet theater. Kyrgyz actresses like her participated in producing a theater that incorporated the images of pre-revolutionary era.⁹⁷

During the second half of the 1930s, the State allowed Kyrgyz women to express their ethnic traditions more openly. The women, in turn, emerged as Soviet women. Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva and other Kyrgyz women helped the Soviet administrators forge a revolutionary culture in Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Along with other "native talents," she played a crucial role in shaping this new and foreign culture into something that appealed to people. Kümüşhaliyeva resembles many in Kyrgyzstan who envisioned their future within the framework of a new and "modern" Soviet system, even while some of their fellow countryman fought against it during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Like many young people of the time who were convinced of the state's promises of prosperity and cultural revolution, she participated in shaping the cultural policies of the state that accommodated both the CPSU and the Kyrgyz people. In the end, the new culture ultimately turned out to be a fusion of revolutionary (primarily Russian) and Kyrgyz cultures, which we may call "the Soviet culture of Kyrgyzstan."⁹⁸ Talented and influential people such as Kümüşhaliyeva fashioned communities that contained elements

⁹⁷ See the statues of Manas (Figure 32 on page 276), and Kanykei (Figure 33 on page 277) in Bishkek.

⁹⁸ I am using the phrase "fusion," instead of "hybrid," because "hybridity" suggests some loss of cultural authenticity. For more on hybridity, see Kandiyoti, "Post-Colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia," 279-297; and Viola, *Contending with Stalinism*, 1-17. See T. O. Koichiev's three-panel series of paintings titled *Kyrgyz Women* (Figures 34, 35 and 36) on pages 278, 279 and 280.

of both cultures. Most importantly, their notion of what it meant to be “modern” transcended notions of ethnicity and nationality.



FIGURE 29: Baken Kyydykeieva and Darkül Küiükova in J. Sadykov's play titled *Manastyn uulu Semetei*, source: a Kyrgyz Theater poster.



FIGURE 30: Three young women are learning to read at a club, source: Kochkor Museum.



Кизилча талысманда энгектегири- Социалисттик
Эмгектин баягыри, стахановчу З.Кайназарова.
Стахановца саяловчунук полый, Герой Социалистичес-
кого труда З.Кайназарова.

Figure 31: Zuurakan Kainazarova, source: Kochkor Museum.



FIGURE 32: Manas, source: my own photograph.



FIGURE 33: Kanyei: my own photograph.



FIGURE 34: T. O. Koichiev painting titled *Pervye bukvy* (*First letters*), 1968, source, Popova, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*.

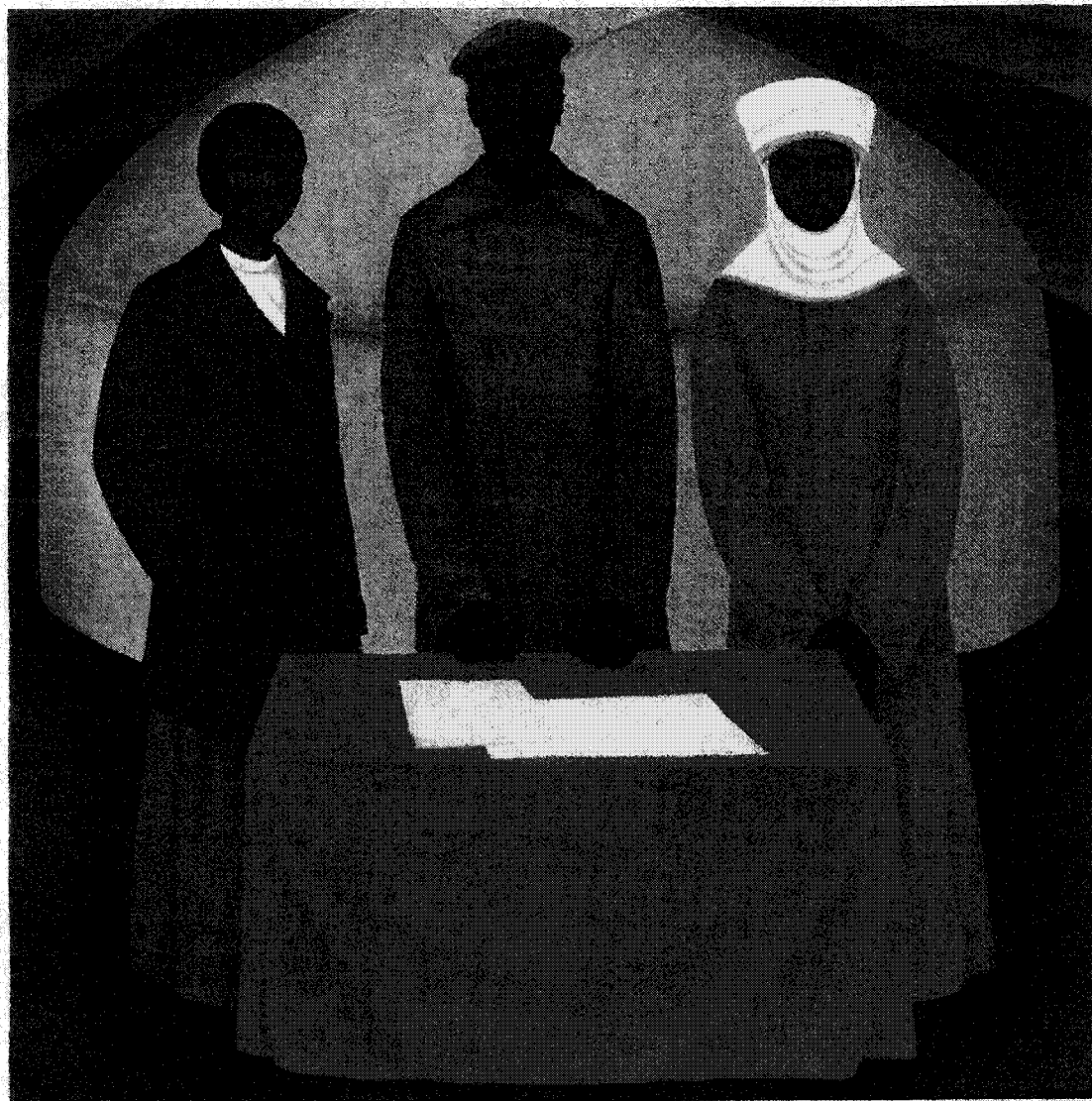


FIGURE 35: T. O. Koichiev painting titled *Na sobranii (At the Meeting)*, 1968, source, Popova, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*.

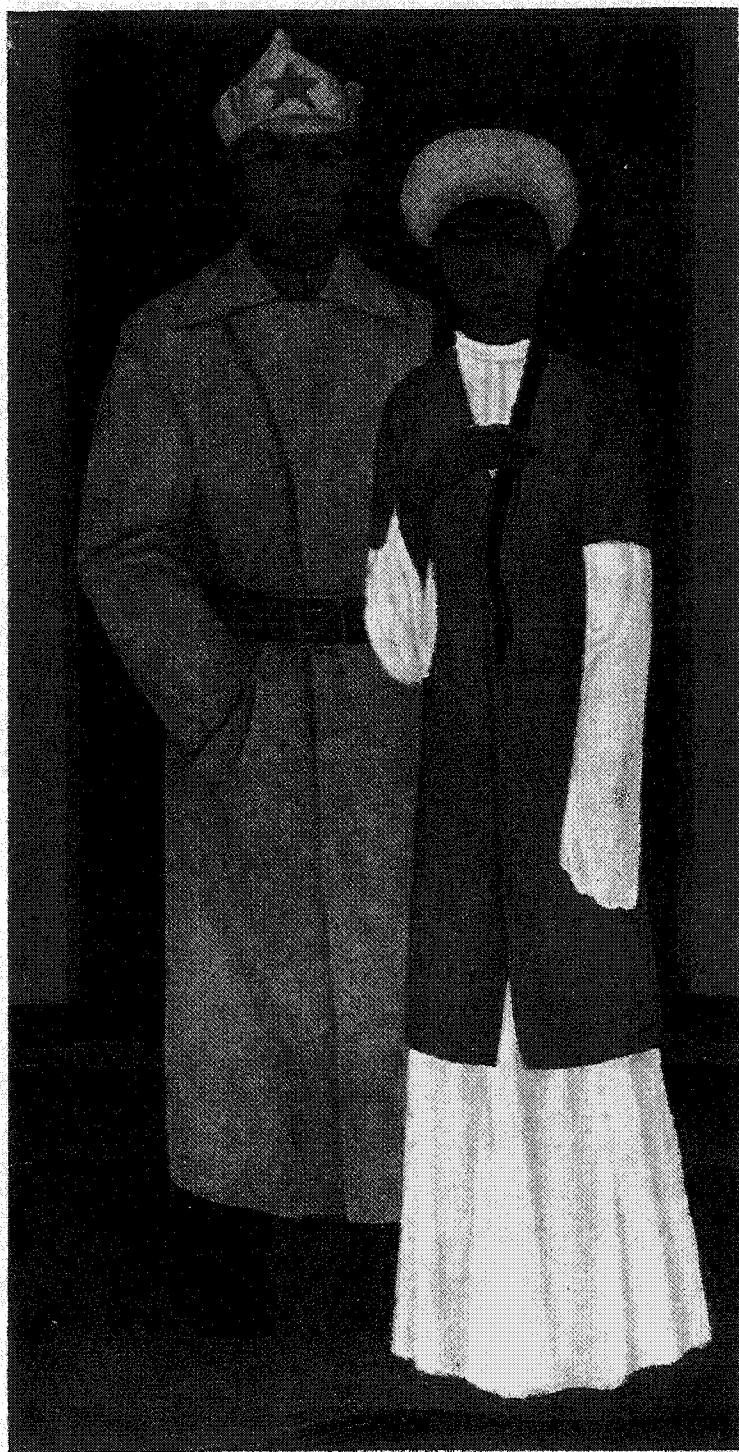


FIGURE 36: T. O. Koichiev painting titled *Nevesta (Bride)*, 1968, source, Popova, *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo Kirgizskoi SSR*.

EPILOGUE

When we examine the cultural activities of clubs after the period considered in this study, we come across a story of mixed results. In 1929, there were nearly 250 cultural education organizations in Kyrgyzstan that included 26 clubs.¹ In the 1940s, the number of clubs multiplied greatly to reach 574 clubs, employing nearly 800 workers. In 1945, the official numbers showed that out of 798 people, nearly 700 people worked in clubs.² The problems with club attendance and participation in activities were not, however, completely alleviated. A 1940 report of the CKP concluded that “the clubs of the Jalal Abad *Oblast* were in extremely unsatisfactory condition.” “Having heard *Comrade* Imanaliyev, the secretary of the cultural education committee in Jalal Abad *Oblast*, the committee came to the conclusion that Jalal Abad *Oblast* Committee does not pay enough attention to the cultural education activity among the population, and the management of the cultural education establishments remains isolated.”³

The language in the official reports regarding the unsatisfactory condition of the clubs and other Houses of Culture demonstrates that club administrators succeeded in implementing cultural and educational activities that specifically focused on the ethnic majority: Kyrgyz.⁴ Although Uzbek-specific activities were prominent in the south, most

¹ Ibraimov, 2001, 311.

² “Report on the situation and the activities of the clubs of the republic during the first half of the year 1945,” TsGAKSSR, December, 25, 1945, f. 1665, op. 17, d. 1, l. 166.

³ “The decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Kirghizia about work of the cultural education establishments of Jalal-Abad *oblast*,” October 5, 1940, IML pri TsKKPSS, f. 56, op. 4, d. 417, ll. 48-52.

⁴ The original idea behind this study was to conduct a comparative study of the Soviet Houses of Culture and the Turkish People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*, 1932-1950). These institutions present a good opportunity to study the similarities and differences between two versions of the same modernist project. The Republic of Turkey (established in 1923) put into practice overnight many modern projects of its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, one of which was the *Halkevleri*. These Turkish institutions replaced their predecessors;

of the documents indicate that building Kyrgyzzness culture took precedence. The discourse of the official documents points to a state-sanctioned nationalism that is framed by socialist ideology. Official correspondence of administrators, however, rarely provided sophisticated methods that would help disseminate socialist ideology. Instead, the authors of these reports reflected their concern with the practical everyday dynamics of the clubs and their members.

Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva also implied in an interview that everyday Kyrgyz traditions overrode some of the state sanctioned activities. As young actors, Kümüşhaliyeva and her comrades were only able to continue their artistic and revolutionary activities after the Second World War. In 1941, many of the young actors in Kümüşhaliyeva's troupe took up arms and went west to defend the Fatherland. The war halted most of the cultural activities in Kyrgyzstan. At the end of the war, the women of the region, including famous actresses like Kümüşhaliyeva, worked to reconstruct the country. She recalled: "There is this Big Chui Channel. Only the women dug that channel. They gave us a little *nan* (flat Central Asian bread) in the morning and the same for lunch. At night we would cook corn ourselves. Despite all the difficulties, we sang. We had a sense of humor about it all."⁵ A young actor accompanying the actress interrupted her with a joke in order to reflect upon this sense of humor:

the late Ottoman reformists' project, Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*, 1912-1932). *Halkevleri*, the Turkish nationalist project, shared many goals and methods with the Bolshevik project. Both projects based their "transformation of culture" on ideological premises. The project in Soviet Kyrgyzstan possessed a complicated history, which could not be explained as simply a story of modern nation-building. Kyrgyz Houses of Culture emerged both as products of Bolshevik ideology and as representatives of the modern world. As a result of these unexplored nuances of the Kyrgyz story and the time constraints, this dissertation does not incorporate the Turkish case.

⁵ Ibid.

During the war, an agitator at a club meeting on agricultural development asked:

“How many hurdles does Soviet agriculture have in Kyrgyzstan?”

A club member yelled out:

“Four: Spring, summer, autumn and winter!”

She forcefully remarked that one had to work for the betterment of one’s country. She affirmed that sacrifices and hard work built her beloved country and that she was proud of her generation. She pointed out that she received the title of National Hero for the relatively small part of Kurmanjan Datkha, the late nineteenth-century Kyrgyz female commander who fought the Russian Imperial forces: a small part perhaps, but the result of years of hard work. Kümüşhaliyeva was still enthusiastic about those years of hardship and development. She argued that one could not have one without the other. “Just as you could not build that dam without work ethics and endurance, you could not build Kyrgyz culture without the tough-love type of instruction of Russian directors. She emphasized: “Where there is hard labor there is beauty and creativity.”⁶

We witness a similar sentiment in Aitmatov’s stories. Aitmatov cherished strong women whom he saw as participants in the cultural development of Kyrgyz, especially during the Second World War era. It is during this period, when many of the women in Aitmatov’s novellas liberated themselves from the old-fashioned norms of their societies. Aitmatov’s heroines broke Central Asian stereotypes: after much internal strife, they stood up and did the right thing for themselves. In *Face to Face* (1958), Seide turned in her deserter husband.⁷ In *Jamila* (1958), Jamila left her husband for a war veteran, while

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Seide (Figure 37) on page 289.

her husband was at war.⁸ In *My Poplar in the Red Scarf* (1959), Asel patiently waited for her unfaithful husband, only to leave him to save her own dignity.⁹

Aitmatov took on the social and political issues of wartime in his early novellas through his female characters' behavior and reactions to events. In *Face to Face*, Seide and Ismail, wife and husband, fought to survive in a desperately poor village. During the "Great Patriotic War," Ismail deserted the army and begins to hide out in a mountain cave. Seide struggled to feed their newborn baby and her elderly mother-in-law at home, while trying to sneak food to Ismail after dark. In the end, Seide chose dignity over loyalty to her husband. She turned her husband in to the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) not only because he was a deserter but also because he committed a crime out of greed --a crime that had a destructive impact on the whole village. Ismail had condemned a desperate war-widow and her children to starvation by stealing and killing their only milk-cow. Aitmatov never gave up on creating heroes, however. In the novella *Jamila*, the heroine portrayed a cheerful yet strong-willed Kyrgyz girl who routinely appeared in Turkic epics as an idealized type. In this tale, Jamila was also a hard-working Soviet woman.¹⁰ During the Great Patriotic War, the women, elderly, children, and veterans who returned with injuries ran the villages.

Kyrgyzzness and its components were expressed in a large number of cultural institutions at the end of the Stalinist era: there were 704 Houses of Culture, including the

⁸ See Jamila (Figure 38) on page 290.

⁹ See Asel (Figure 39) on page 291.

¹⁰ Jamila takes on many of the duties of her husband Sadyk while he is at the front. She works the fields and mentors her young brother-in-law Seit. She also becomes the darling of her mother-in-law who sees the future in Jamila. Nevertheless, Jamila betrays not only the admiration of her mother-in-law but also her husband when she runs off with Daniar, an injured war veteran.

clubs and four national theaters in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹ After the death of Stalin in 1953, de-Stalinization policies of the Khrushchev era encouraged creativity and more individualized participation of the people in the clubs. Club members were to look to the future and build the new Soviet citizen.¹² But, this was also a period of cultural innovation in the West. Motion pictures, popular music, novels, and other universally influential art forms spread messages of human rights issues, such as personal freedom.

During and after the 1950s, Kyrgyz art received significant attention from Moscow. In 1958, the Second Ten-Day Festival of Kyrgyz Arts and Literature took place in Moscow. During such events, famous Kyrgyz akyns and popular singers and writers such as Aitmatov were able to express their admiration for their cultural heritage as they adhered to the genre of socialist realism. They were often rewarded for it. In 1963, Chingiz Aitmatov received the Lenin Award for his book of short stories titled *Povesti gor i stepei (Tales of the Mountains and Steppes)*. Aitmatov's short stories and novellas began to define Kyrgyz culture. His stories were read and staged regularly in clubs. In October 1966, Osh Oblast received the Lenin Order for building successful economic and cultural institutions. Club activities were important sources of cultural enlightenment for the Party, especially in the south where traditional cultural influences continued to be prominent. Rewarding the southern oblast of Osh for cultural activities reflected the Party's views and worries, regarding Kyrgyzstan.

¹¹ Daniyarov, *Osushchestvlenie Leninskoi programmy kul'turnoi revoliutsii v Kirgizii*; and Urazggildiev et al, *Kyrgyz Respublikasynda Bazar Mamilesine Otuu Shartynda Madanii Dem Aluu Ishterdigi*. In 1990, the number of clubs reached 1181. During the same year, there were 29 theaters in Kyrgyzstan.

¹² White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture*, 36-37.

The Thaw period following the horrors of the Stalin Era allowed a period of relief for the creative arts. As Kümüşhaliyeva's coming of age story reveals, however, the formative years of Kyrgyz Theater took place under Stalin. Kümüşhaliyeva never blamed Stalin for anything. On the contrary, she suggested that the 'tough love' of the leader was necessary and brought cultural prosperity to her country. Her identity, at least as an actor, is directly related to the hardships she endured. It is not easy to separate the actress from the woman. She concluded: "The stage became my friend, my companion, my life."

During and after the Khrushchev era, cultural enlightenment meant opening people's universities, encouraging enthusiasm in higher education and spontaneity in arts and sciences. Festivals and other celebrations were to support these enlightenment objectives. The cultural policy during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years required artists to "volunteer" their services to clubs in remote places. The clubs' function as a center of propaganda was stronger than ever. "Volunteer" artists were to conduct simultaneously artistic education and socialist propaganda. During the Khrushchev years, because the financial constraints did not improve, the clubs and other Houses of Culture failed to increase their influence in Kyrgyzstan. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, Western music, literature, and films represented primary cultural influences that the Soviet state viewed as a threat to the culture of the USSR. Thus, the USSR needed to strengthen its socialist ideology in the arts against the bourgeois culture of the West. As a result, the Party ordered and expected the clubs to teach realist art to combat the new trends in the West.

During the 1980s, however, many clubs became movie houses or gathering places, which did not improve the socialist education of the city and ail populations. Leisure activities gradually became the main unofficial purpose of the clubs, and many became discotheques. Regional and personal initiative triumphed when the state lacked the resources to back its cultural policies.

On November 6, 2004, about three hundred elderly people rallied in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, marking the anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. This was an act of celebration of Soviet times and a protest against Russian Parliament's proposal to abandon the Soviet holiday. The rally took place at the central square of Bishkek which is the only Central Asian capital to preserve Lenin's statue.¹³ This is the same square where the members of Soviet Houses of Culture learned to celebrate their Kyrgyzness during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴

During a trip to Kyrgyzstan in 2002, I witnessed that many former Soviet Houses of Culture there were turning into chapels and churches for newly-arrived Christian missionaries. These Soviet institutions of education, which launched the first anti-religious activities, were beginning to become houses of worship. In contrast, groups of elderly people were still celebrating the Great October Revolution Day, which the Kyrgyz Republic preserved as a national holiday. These incidents suggest that the legacy of war heroism which Kümüşaliyeva and Aitmatov narrate is directly connected to the narrative of the heroic October Revolution. Club documents, plays and much of Kyrgyz Literature repeatedly make this connection clear. The recipients of these messages of

¹³ Bellaby, "Russians Mark Revolution Day With Protests."

¹⁴ See Lenin's statue in Bishkek (Figure 40) on page 292.

heroism still respond with nostalgia. The findings of this study show that these Kyrgyz elites accepted the responsibility to showcase their ethnicity within the framework of socialism. In other words, they learned to speak the language of the cultural revolution with a Kyrgyz accent. Their national narrative portrayed Kyrgyzzness wrapped in a Soviet cloak.



FIGURE 37: Seide and her baby, in an R. B. Nudel' lithograph titled *Litsom k litsu*, 1960.



FIGURE 38: Jamila, in an L. A. Il'ina lithograph, 1966.



FIGURE 39: Asel, in an L. A. Il'ina lithograph, titled *Topolek moi b krasnoi kosynke*, 1966.



FIGURE 40: Lenin in Bishkek, source: my own photograph.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to explain the ways in which Kyrgyz administrators and intellectuals constructed a discourse of cultural development and improvement, and the ways in which they put such discourse into practice. In the first two chapters, this study expanded upon the secondary literature and the theoretical framework of the dissertation to explain the basic concepts and definitions upon which it relies. Chapter One discussed the imperial roots of Soviet “Asiatic” images of Turkic and Muslim peoples such as the Kyrgyz. In order to describe the complexity of such images, it incorporated a brief history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual and cultural trends in Russia and Central Asia. Chapter Two provided background on Soviet attempts to establish a cultural policy among Kyrgyz people that advocated both national and socialist elements.

Chapter Three, turned to the primary sources, namely the correspondence of cultural activists who helped create and administer the Kyrgyz Houses of Culture, demonstrating the intricacies of establishing a modern culture among Kyrgyz. Chapter Three provided a background on the establishment of clubs and asked how club administrators and members attempted to negotiate with the Soviet system in fashioning Kyrgyzness. Chapter Four was dedicated to Stalinist celebrations, such as the Olympiads, and discussed the implementation of official discourse on cultural development. It examined the regional cultural practices that played a part in establishing the nature of celebrations in Kyrgyzstan. Chapter Five showed that Kyrgyz

revolutionaries and the first generation of Kyrgyz Theater professionals who were exposed to western theater tradition in clubs managed to create a national Kyrgyz image that suited Soviet ideology. Chapter Six suggested that club documents from the late 1920s and 1930s, as well as Aitmatov's works, indicated that Soviet authorities and intellectuals saw the women of Kyrgyzstan, such as the actress Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva, as a symbol of cultural revolution. Women, in turn, took on this duty and helped shape Kyrgyzzness. Aitmatov, Kümüşhaliyeva, ail club administrators, theater professionals, and festival organizers demonstrated that they played a part in creating Kyrgyzzness. While executing their official duties and performances, they managed to blend their own version of Kyrgyz identity into the official Soviet Kyrgyzzness.

This study has argued that club administrators, theater professionals and Olympiad organizers were engaged in fashioning a new Kyrgyz community. It suggested that the involvement of the indigenous (both Uzbek and Kyrgyz) professionals and activists, such as Kümüşhaliyeva, in clubs and theaters contributed in defining Kyrgyz culturedness. The same activist, however, allowed their grandmothers and mothers to remain true to their nomadic roots, suggesting that Kyrgyz traditions such as *hurmat* (respect for the elders) were important for a Kyrgyz family or the Kyrgyz community. This is just one example how there was enough room for tradition within the modern. The indigenous cultural revolutionaries' behavior illustrate that they participated in a modernizing project without viewing it as subordination of their culture.

Official cultural education policies of the Stalinist era before the Second World War encouraged Kyrgyz ail officials to showcase the ethnic features of their nationalities

in the clubs and Stalinist celebrations. Most administrators accepted this responsibility and learned to “play their ethnicity.” Club administrators created neatly manageable categories to transform what they believed, represented ethnic communities of the ail populations.

Like Aitmatov and the fictional characters of his early work, many Kyrgyz and Uzbek women and men I interviewed talked enviously and proudly about the artistic achievements of the first generation of Soviet Central Asia. They were grateful for the opportunities their parents were able to hand down to their children. Both women and men believed that they, like their parents, owed their high educational standards and knowledge of the arts to Soviet education and art programs, but they missed the “national enthusiasm” and novelty of ethnic participation in the early Soviet artistic activities such as the Olympiads. Their accounts may have been tinted with nostalgia for the “good old days,” but their concerns seem genuinely valid to them.

The ethnically particular narratives became apparent in Sabira Kümüşhaliyeva’s story. Kümüşhaliyeva talked about her and her fellow Kyrgyz actors’ successes as a matter of pride for her nationality. Her narrative framed her generation’s history within the Soviet construction of Kyrgyzzness. As a “national hero,” she constructed an image that possessed overt Kyrgyz ethnicity, as prominently displayed as the *elechek* she wore when she played an elderly Kyrgyz woman.¹ She credited the Soviet state for making it possible for her to become a hero.

These intellectuals and other talented individuals asserted their own understanding of culture and Kyrgyzzness into this Soviet community. Kyrgyz

¹ *Elechek* is the headdress of elderly Kyrgyz women. See the Glossary.

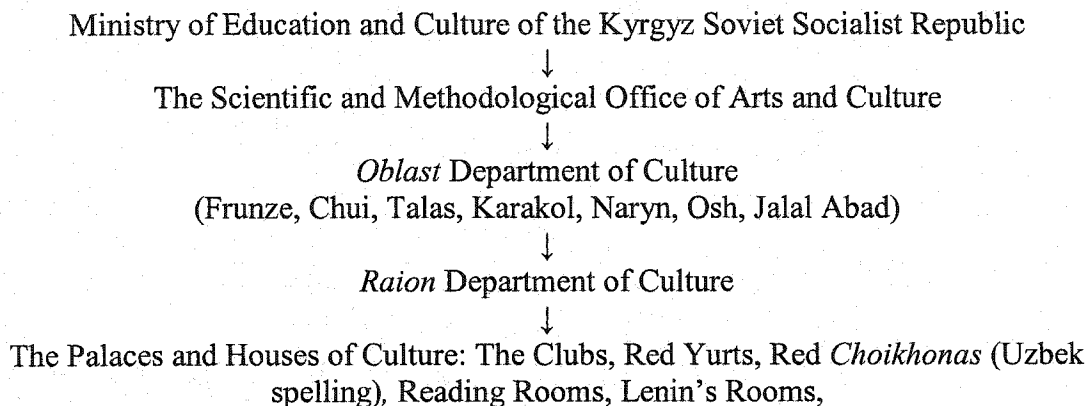
community that emerged at the end of this process was distinct from any other Soviet community, at least in Central Asia. Soviet Kyrgyzzness juxtaposed nomadic traditions with socialist egalitarianism and integrated national epics such as *Manas* into the modern national narrative. Kyrgyz of the Soviet era preserved ethnic markers such as language and cuisine at the ail while absorbing the larger Soviet culture, expressed through the Russian language and civilization into their urban landscape.

Soviet modernity and Kyrgyz tradition did not collide, but converged into something new. Kyrgyz, like Kazakhs and unlike Uzbeks and Tajiks, managed to avoid a clash of Soviet and indigenous cultures. Uzbek and Tajik everyday traditions, which were comparatively closer to orthodox Islam, posed a more serious threat to the Soviet regime. I speculate that Kyrgyz and Kazakh nomadic traditions, and their particularly unorthodox approach to Islam allowed them to be more open and flexible when dealing with outside cultural influences. Lastly, Kyrgyz may have been distinct from Kazakhs because of their relatively compact and closely connected population.

Kyrgyz were able to cherish and protect their indigenous community. This was different than the discursive claims of the Bolsheviks who predicted that the new Soviet identities would merge their traditions with socialism. Kyrgyz elderly who still celebrate the “Great October Revolution,” as well as *Nouruz*, and Kyrgyz families who still display Lenin’s portraits next to their *shyrdaks* in their houses do not disentangle their Kyrgyzzness from the narrative of the Bolshevik Revolution. The case of the Kyrgyz Houses of Culture shows that Kyrgyz fashioned their new community as a fusion of Kyrgyzzness and Soviet modernity.

GLOSSARY¹

Administrative Structure in the 1920s to 1940s:



Adat: Central Asian customary law. USSR abolished it in mid-1920s. Local Central Asian communities did not stop using it for minor disputes until the mid-1930s.

Ail: Kyrgyz mountain village, rural settlement or tribal family unit.

Airan: Sour curdled milk.

Aitysh: Singing contest between two *akyns* who challenge each other by singing improvised songs. *Akyns* improvise their stories with or without the *komuz*.

Aksakal or *chal*: Respected elder of a family, tribe or *ail*. Literally “white bearded” elder administrator of a *mahalla*.

Akyn: A bard, often traveling master of *aitysh*, who composes and sings his own songs, and is considered a respected leader of the community.

Ala-Too: A Kyrgyz language literary journal, named after snow-capped mountains. (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan basmasy, 1931)

Archa: Juniper tree, which Kyrgyz people considerate holy.

¹ All the references in this section are taken from the following sources: Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*, (Lanham and Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004); *Kyrgyz Soviet Entsiklopediiasy*, (Frunze: Kyrgyz Soviet Entsiklopediiasynyn Bashky Redaktsiiasy, 1976); *Kyrgyzstan: Entsiklopediia*, (Bishkek: Kirgizskaya Entsiklopediia, 2001); B. O. Oruzbaeva, et al, eds., *Oshskaia Oblast Entsiklopediia*, (Frunze: Glavnaia Redaktsiia Kirgizskoi Sovetskoi Entsiklopedii, 1987); A. Karypkulov, et al, eds., *Chui Oblusu (Chuiskaya Oblast) Entsiklopediya*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Entsiklopediyasynyn Bashky Redaktsiyasy, 1994); C. Aitmatov, et al, eds., *Talas Oblusu (Talasskaia Oblast) Entsiklopediya*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Entsiklopediyasynyn Bashky Redaktsiyasy, 1995); and U. Asanov, et al. eds., *Naryn Oblusu Entsiklopediya*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Entsiklopediyasynyn Bashky Redaktsiyasy, 1998).

Ashar: A tradition of reciprocity. Families help each other when they are in need.

Bai: A wealthy person or a term of respect. It is also a pre-Soviet term for tribal leaders.

Bakshy: Shaman.

Barymta: A tradition of young men raiding other tribes' herds.

Bashkarma: The manager of a small administration unit such as a *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*.

Basmachi Movement: The Turkic word "Basmachi" means "the one who overpowers others." This was the term the Soviet state preferred for the Central Asian anti-Soviet fighters. The other Turkic word "*Qurbashi*" means the night-watchman. This was the term Central Asian fighters preferred for themselves. The Basmachi movement was the largest armed opposition movement against Bolshevik rule in Central Asia. In the final weeks of 1917, Irgash *bai* in Osh organized and led the first rebel groups. In 1918, Madaminbek led another group and gained control of the eastern Fergana Valley. In mid 1919, the Basmachis joined forces with the White Army and seized Jalal Abad, Osh and other major settlements. At the end of 1919 and at the beginning of 1920, Mikhail Frunze defeated the Basmachis and took control of the region.

Batyr: A legendary national hero, such as *Manas*.

Bishkek: The capital and largest city in the Chui valley of northern Kyrgyzstan. A small village called Pishpek; it became a Kokand Khanate fortress in 1825. The Russian Empire destroyed the fortress and established a garrison there in 1864. After the Bolshevik Revolution, it became Frunze in 1926.

Biy: Hereditary title among nomadic leading families, clans and tribes, or a judge.

Bozüi (*yurt* or *yrta*): A dome-shaped felt dwelling, common in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. *Bozui* means "gray-house," but symbolizes belonging to Kyrgyz community. It is most commonly used in the *jayloo*. It is constructed with a collapsible wooden lattice frame (*kerege*) and felt covering, and is easily assembled within a few hours. The cone-shaped roof has an opening called the *tündük* to let out the smoke from the hearth in the center of the *bozüi*. The interior consists of men's half (*er jak*) and women's half (*aial jak*). *Körpöchö* (traditional cotton-filled quilts), *shyrdak* (embroidered felt carpets), and *ala kiyiz* (traditional bicolor woolen carpet) cover the floor.

Chaikhana (Kyrgyz) or *Choikhona* (Uzbek): Traditional tea-room or tea-house where men drink tea, *airan*, *kymyz*; eat; and socialize.

Chapan: Traditional men's outdoor garment, usually long and quilted.

Chui Valley: Shared valley between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, located between the Ala-Too Mountains in the south and the Chui Illyi Mountains in the north. It was one of the ancient Silk Road routes, which became one of the Soviet-era agricultural and industrial regions.

Clan: Regional patronage network or a regional kinship group. Two traditional and often competing Kyrgyz clans are the northern (Chui, Ysyk Kol, Naryn and Talas) and the southern (Batken, Jalal Abad and Osh) clans.

CPK: The Communist Party of the Kyrgyz SSR was established in 1924 as the Party center of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous *Oblast*. The first CPK Congress was held between March 23 and 26, 1925; the last was held on November 26, 1994.

Datkha: High-ranking title in the Kokand Khanate, or a ruler of a region.

Elechek: Head-dress of a married Kyrgyz woman.

Erkin Too: Along with *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan*, it was the first national newspaper (1924). It was, like all publications, state owned and operated, therefore closely controlled. In addition to these two newspapers, there were about ninety newspapers with an annual circulation of approximately 185 million copies (and forty-six journals with a circulation of about 21 million) at the end of the USSR. The state generously subsidized and relentlessly censored all publications.

Fergana Valley: A shared valley between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, located between the Tian-Shan Mountains in the north and the Gissaro-Alay Mountains in the south. It was one of the ancient Silk Road routes, which in the Soviet era became one of the major cotton and silk producing regions, and an industrial center.

Five-Year Plans (Piatiletka) in the Kyrgyz SSR: A Soviet economic development plan. Kyrgyz economic experts at the Kyrgyz State Planning Committee (GosPlan) assisted the GosPlan of the USSR to implement centralized development in the republic. The twelve five-year plans began in 1928 and ended in 1991.

Gap: A traditional gathering, separately held among women and men that helps communities discuss current matters and sustain a reciprocal support network.

Hujum or Khudjum: the unveiling campaign of 1927-1929 in Muslim regions of the Soviet Union.

Jadid: A late nineteenth century, early twentieth century Central Asian movement to modernize Islamic education with the aid of Western methods.

Jailoo: A summer pasture of nomadic populations in the high mountains. More than a geographical term, it is a pivotal Kyrgyz social and cultural phenomenon where the children learned about their traditions and history.

Jan(ym): A term of endearment, meaning soul or life.

Jenge: A respectful term of address for a wife of an older brother or relative, or an aunt.

Jin: An evil spirit.

Jogorku Kengesh (Supreme Soviet): The Parliament of the Kyrgyz SSR. It was a unicameral 350-seat political body. The members of this body were "elected" every five years and only met twice a year. The last one was elected in 1990; it was abolished in 1994 and replaced with the post-Soviet bicameral body in 1995.

Kalyng (or *qalyym*): A bride's-price or dowry, paid by the bridegroom and his family. The bride's family may accept it in part as money and in part as livestock or household items.

Kaziat: Established in 1943, the Islamic regulatory administration the Kyrgyz SSR. Its Islamic scholarly leader *kazi* reported to the Muftiat, the foremost Central Asian Islamic agency, located in Tashkent. Kaziat regulated the activities of all Muslim institutions.

Kyz ala kachuu: Bride-stealing. It is a Middle Eastern/Central Asian tradition of illegal (in the Soviet period) marriage that may or may not be consensual. In some cases, it involves abduction of an unmarried woman to avoid *kalyng* (bride-prize or dowry); in other cases, eloping.

Komuz: A traditional three-stringed wooden Kyrgyz musical instrument.

Koshchu: A particularly important farmers' organization that helped early Soviet administrators organize cooperatives among the farmers, and organize acquisition of land and grain from the *bais* and *manaps*.

Kurultai: A meeting of tribal leaders for elections or other events.

Kymyz: The national drink, produced from mare's milk that is fermented in an animal skin bag.

Kyrgyz: An ethnic group or a nationality (in Soviet terminology). Kyrgyz live in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Russia, China and Turkey. Until 1926, the Russian imperial and Soviet ethnographers referred to Kazakh people as Kyrgyz (or Kaisak-Kyrgyz) and Kyrgyz people as Kara-Kyrgyz (True and/or dark Kyrgyz). Chinese

historical chronicles and Kyrgyz legends suggest that at the beginning of the millennium the earliest known ancestors of Kyrgyz lived in southern Siberia. Between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D., the first nomadic Kyrgyz tribes began to develop. It was not until the thirteenth century Mongol domination of the region that Kyrgyz began to be distinguished from other Turkic nomads. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Kyrgyz tribes formed a united and distinct identity.

Kyrgyz Language: An Altaic language from the Turkic branch and the Kypchak group. The written language changed scripts three times: Arabic (until 1926), Latin (until 1940) and Cyrillic (after 1940). There are three major tribal dialects. An estimated five million people speak Kyrgyz in Central Asia, Van (in northeastern Turkey) and Sinkiang (in China).

Kyrgyz Religion: Between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, Kyrgyz tribes converted to Sunni Islam from a native belief system that worshiped ancestors and natural spirits. Their practice of Islam incorporated pre-Islamic beliefs, all of which came under attack during the first part of the Stalinist era.

Kyrgyz SSR: A full member of the USSR (December 5, 1936). Its mostly nomadic or rural population (more than eighty percent) was one and a half million.

Kyrgyz State Theater of Opera and Ballet (1937): The first Western-style performing arts institution, originally called the Theater of Music and Drama. Most of the performances were in Kyrgyz. The first performances were the opera *Aichürök (Lunar Beauty)* (1939) and the ballet *Anar* (1940).

Kyrgyzchylyk: Translated as "Kyrgyzness," a term that Chingiz Aitmatov introduced in his novel *The Day Lasts More Than Hundred Years* (1980). It has been used as a unifying idea against tribal and clan divisions, and alienation from Kyrgyz culture.

Kyrgyzfilm: The Soviet film studio of Kyrgyz SSR (1942). After producing a number of government sanctioned documentary films, it produced its first feature film titled *Saltanat*, in 1955.

Kyshtak: A non-nomadic (sedentary) village.

Kysthtoo or Kyshtak: A winter pasture of nomadic populations in the lowland meadows and valleys. Once nomadism began to disappear, many families settled in the *kysthtoo*.

Mahalla (mahallah or mahallya): A community organization that relies on neighborhood relations and support. It is a pre-imperial and semi-official institution that took on a new identity during the Soviet era. Nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakh populations adopted it from sedentary Uzbek and Tajik societies. *Aksakals*, including the elderly women, carried the leadership role and organized construction, repair and charity work, and celebrations.

Manap: A traditional noble leader or a tsarist-era administrator. It is the Kyrgyz equivalent of the Soviet (Russian) term *kulak*, a wealthy petty bourgeois.

Manas: See the biography section below.

Manaschy: An *akyn* whose craft is to recite or sign the Manas epic. *Manaschys* commit to memory main episodes of the epic, but improvise certain episodes according to their poetic skills. They recite it with or without the *komuz*. Kyrgyz reserve for the *manaschy* a revered and influential place in their society as the guardians of their most important epic and historical tradition.

Medrese (madrasa or madrasah): An Islamic middle school or a higher theological institution or seminary.

Mektep (or maktab): A pre-revolutionary primary or secondary school. During the Soviet period, some schools with Kyrgyz and Uzbek language education were called *mektep*.

Mullah (khojo or moldo): A Muslim cleric.

Myrza: A term of respect (“sir,” “my lord,” or alike.)

Naqshbandiya: An influential fourteenth-century Sufi order that facilitated the spread of Islam among the nomadic populations. Baha ad-Din Naqshband (1318-89) founded the order.

Nawruz (or Nouruz): The most important spring celebration that originated in pre-Islamic times. It is a non-official holiday in many Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries. It was outlawed during the Soviet era.

Paranja (or hurjum): A Central Asian veil that Uzbek women wore and Southern Kyrgyz women wore in public. In the mid 1920s, the Soviet state outlawed it and launched the *Hujum* (unveiling) against it.

Qadi (or kady): An Islamic judge. In the mid 1920s, the Soviet state outlawed the Shariat and the jurisdiction of the *qadi*.

Qarnai: A traditional southern (mostly Uzbek) long wind pipe, played in celebrations.

Sart: A common ethnic term for sedentary populations (Uzbeks and Tajiks). Pre-revolutionary censuses included this term as an official category. It remained in use until the Soviet border delimitation (1924-26). The southern Kyrgyz still use it as a derogatory term for Uzbeks or Tajiks.

Shariat (or *Shar'ia*): The path leading to the water (in Arabic), meaning to the very source of life. It is the Islamic Law built on four foundations: the *Qor'an* (or *Koran*); the *Hadith* (the *Sunna* or the recorded story of the life and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad); the *Ijma* (the consensus among Islamic scholars on the practice of the law); and *Qiyas* (the analogical reasoning of the practice among Islamic scholars).

Sajare (*Shejere* or *sanjyra*): A genealogical family (also clan and tribal) tree that all Kyrgyz males need to know. Knowing the names and deeds of one's ancestors, seven generations back, was a traditional requirement of all men.

Sufism: Mystical Islamic orders (or *tariqat*) lead by charismatic leaders. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Sufi tradition emerged as a new interpretation of Islam that guided its members (*murid*) to develop their personal spirituality and mystical connection to the divine. The most influential Sufi order in Central Asia, Naqshbandiya helped spread Islam among Kyrgyz.

Toi: A traditional celebration such as a wedding or a circumcision.

Trade Unions: In 1917, the first trade unions were established in Pishpek. In 1920, there were fourteen trade unions with almost ten-thousand members. They ultimately became the largest public economic and political institution with 1.6 million members.

Tribal organizations: Kyrgyz people see themselves as members of social groups (*ulut*) that are united by common descent and tradition. According to one of the theories, Kyrgyz name means forty *kyrk kyz* (forty girls), from which *kyrk ulut* (forty tribes) emerged. The three tribal organization are the *Ong Kanat* (the Right Wing in the north of the Ala-Too region), the *Sol Kanat* (the Left Wing in the south of the Ala-Too region), and the *Ichkilik* from the central regions. Each group includes at least eight, and at most nineteen separate tribes. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Kyrgyz nomadic populations consolidated into distinct tribes developing allegiances to their own tribes and regional tribal organizations.

Turkistan (Turkestan in Russian): A geographical region and a cultural entity that included the territory and the cultural traditions of the Central Asian people. The concept of Turkistan refers to the Turkic and Persian speaking, mostly Muslim populations (a small but significant Jewish population of Bukhara also consider themselves Turkistani), including the Turkic and Persian people of Sinkiang, China.

Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR): The republic of the Russian Federation that existed between 1918 and the establishment of Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) in 1920. On April 30, 1918, TASSR was established in Tashkent at the Fifth All-Turkistan Congress of the Soviets. It included southern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR): The successor of the TASSR that existed between September 24, 1920 and the border delimitation of October 27, 1924.

TURKSIB (Turkestanско-Sibirskaya Zheleznaya Doroga): The 1,451 kilometer-long railroad between Semipalatinsk and Almaty, Kazakhstan, built between 1927 and 1932. It connects to the Central Asian Railroad at Lugovaya and continues to Bishkek.

Uchkun Publishing House: The largest state-controlled publishing house established in Frunze in 1926. Between its inauguration and 2000, it published more than 100 million copies of books and other printed materials.

Union of Cinematographers of Kyrgyzstan: The professional union of the workers of cinematic arts, established in 1962. Chingiz Aitmatov was its first elected president. It started out as an organization that provided training and advocated the social rights of its members, but became a static bureaucratic organization that mostly supervised the distribution of state subsidies for movie production.

Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan: One of the oldest professional unions in the arts, established in 1932. It provided artistic and method training and social benefits to its members and arranged translations of Kyrgyz language works to Russian and other languages of the USSR. It worked under the close control of the CPK. As a result, it became an exclusive and bureaucratic entity. It published the Kyrgyz language literary journal *Ala-Too*, the Russian language journal *Literaturnyi Kyrgyzstan* and the newspaper *Kyrgyzstan Madaniyaty*.

Uprisings: Madali Ishan led the 1898 uprising against the Russian Empire. A large number of Kyrgyz tribes supported this uprising that began in the Uzbek city of Andijan. 10,000 to 20,000 Central Asians destroyed the imperial buildings, but were defeated by the Russian forces. In June 1916, the imperial government decreed the military conscription of the previously exempt Central Asian men to fight against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. Out of resentment, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Uzbeks attacked local imperial buildings and Russian populations. They killed many imperial administrators and non-Central Asian settlers. The Cossack regiments of the Tsarist Army retaliated, killing and forcing many Central Asians to flee. Many Kyrgyz and Kazakh families escaped to the Sinkiang region of China. An estimated 140,000 Kyrgyz people vanished or fled to China.

Vaqf (*waqf* or *vakyf*): A religious endowment donated to mosques and *medreses*. Until the 1920s' government confiscation, the *vaqfs* owned and controlled crucial properties and lands in Central Asia. The Soviet government distributed the *vaqf* lands to the local residents.

Zar Zaman: A period of hard-times or disaster, referring to the Russian colonial rule. Kyrgyz and Kazakhs use to term to mark the catastrophes in their history such as the uprising of 1916 and the Basmachi rebellion. The term was also used by the Turkic reformers and literary intellectuals of the late imperial Russia.

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Appendix A: Short Biographies of Important People

Abdurakhmanov, Yusup (1901-1938): The first chairman of the Council of Commissars and the first prime minister of the Kyrgyz ASSR (1927-33). He was executed in 1938.

Aitmatov, Chingiz (1928-): Author and politician from Sheker *ail* in Talas *oblast*. He joined the CPK (1959) and worked as a *Pravda* correspondent (1959-65). He was the chairman of the Union of Cinematographers of Kyrgyzstan (1969-86) and the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1966-89). He also served as the people's deputy of the Supreme Soviet and as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. He is currently the Kyrgyz ambassador to Luxembourg. He is one of the most internationally read non-Russian writers of the Former Soviet Union. He published his first story (*Newspaper Boy Jüyö*) in 1952. See the complete list of his works in the bibliography. Aitmatov received the "Kyrgyz Peoples' Writer" award in 1968 and the "Hero of the Socialist Labor" award in 1978.

Akiyev, Kalyk (1883-1953): A well-known *akyn*, a master of *aitysh* and poet from Naryn *oblast*. He was a supporter of Bolshevik revolutionary ideas.

Akmatov, Kazat (1941-): Author and politician from Tambashat *ail* in Osh *oblast*. He was editor of the Kyrgyzstan Publishing House (1974-83), and became chairman of the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1989). His novel *Years around the Sun* was an influential critique of the Stalinist administration.

Frunze, Mikhail (1885-1925): A Moldavian Bolshevik Red Army commander, born in Pishpek, who defeated the White Army enemy, the Basmachis and the Bukhara and Khiva Khanate forces. Frunze was one of the founders of the Red Army and the early Bolshevik military diplomacy. In addition to his military successes, he wrote tactical books on military operations. In 1926, the capital Pishpek was named after him.

Hoja or *Mullah* Nasreddin: A folk hero, whose satirical anecdotes do not spare any political, cultural or societal institutions, including the tsarist and Soviet systems. The jokes and anecdotes of this imaginary figure are prominent in the folk culture of all Muslim societies in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Kasymbekov, Tolögön (1931-): A writer and politician, born in Akjol *ail* of Jalal Abad *oblast*. He became the editor of *Ala-Too* in 1967 and the senior editor of the Kyrgyzstan Publishing House in 1973. His books *Slomannyi mech*, (*The Broken Sword*) and *Kel-Kel*, were based on Kyrgyz national pride, became influential and controversial.

Kiyzbayeva, Saira (1917-1998): She was born in Tököldösh *ail*, near Frunze in Chui *oblast*. She was a soprano, who received the 'Peoples' Artist of the Kyrgyz SSR' in 1948 and the "Peoples' Artist of the USSR" in 1958. In the Ten-Day Festival of 1939 in

Moscow, she sang the title role of Aichürök in *Aichürök* by V. Vlasov, A. Maldybayev and V. Fere.

Kurmanjan Datkha (Kurmanjan Mamatbai-kyzy, 1811-1907): The most revered female military leader, a colonel in the Imperial Army and legendary hero. In 1862, she took over the leadership of the Pamiro-Alay tribes when her husband Alymbek Datkha died during a battle with the Kokand Khanate. In 1864, as a result of diplomatic negotiations, she accepted the protectorate of the Russian Empire. The Russians promoted her to the rank of colonel and admirably referred to her as the "Alay Queen."

Kümüşhaliyeva, Sabira (1917-): She was born in Tököldösh *ail*, near Frunze in Chui *Oblast*. While studying drama at the Frunze Pedagogical Institute, she began working at the Kyrgyz National Drama Theater. Her famous stage roles include: Stepanida in *Polkovodets Suborov* of I. Behterev and A. Razumovskii; Lyubov' Shevtsova in *Molodaya Gvardiya* of A. Fedeev; Gülgaaky in *Kurmanbek* of K. Jantöshev; Dun'ka in *Lyubov' Yarovaya* of K. Trenev; Maisalbübü in *Tar Kapchygay* of T. Abumomunov; Onolkan in *Atanyn Tagdyry* of B. Jakiev; Sherbet in *Müröktün Suucu* of A. Dyikanbaev; Batyina and Burma in *Karkyralar Kaitkanda*, and *Jygylgan Oogongo Külöt* of T. Abdumomunov; Balyndad in *Küiöö Joldosh* of J. Sadykov; Zhenshchina Hohotunka in *Jürölüchü Jürök Oorutpai* of B. Jakiev; Bübüsh in *Köl Jeegindegi Üi* of M. Tokobaev; Üpöl in *Jaryktyk Karylarym* of T. Abdumomunov; Mat' Richarda in *Richard the Third* of W. Shakespeare; and Mat' Naiman in *Kylym Karytar Bir Kün* of C. Aitmatov. Her well-known film roles include: Mat' Tailaka in *Karash-Karash Okuyasy* of B. Shamshiev; Mat' Urkuya in *Urkuya* of T. Okeyev; and Karagyz in *Ak Keme* of B. Shamshiev.

Kydykeieva, Baken (1923-1994): She was born in Tököldösh *ail*. She received the 'Peoples' Artist of the Kyrgyz SSR' in 1955 and the 'Peoples' Artist of the USSR' in 1970. Her famous roles include Anna in *Anna Karenina* by L. Tolstoy, and Desdemona in *Othello* by W. Shakespeare.

Küiükova, Darkul (1919-): She was born in Tököldösh *ail*. She received the 'People's Artist of the Kyrgyz SSR' award in 1958 and the 'Peoples' Artist of the USSR' award in 1967. She is a highly acclaimed theater and motion picture actress whose roles include Tolgonai in *Materinskoye Pole* by C. Aitmatov.

Madaminbek (killed in 1921): A Basmachi commander between 1918 and 1921. In 1919, his troupes took control of most of the Fergana Valley. His supporters were the Russian White Army, the agents of the Ottoman and British Empires. The Red Army and local supporters of the Bolsheviks defeated Madaminbek's troupes and killed him.

Maldybayev, Abdylas (1906-1978): A composer, singer and actor from Kara Bulak *ail* of Chui *oblast*. In the early 1920s, he began writing music. His songs *Akynai* and *Life* became classics. He wrote many marches, songs, a symphony and many compositions. In 1937, he earned the title of People's Artist of Kyrgyz SSR and in 1939 the same title

of the USSR. Between 1939 and 1967, he served as the chairman of the Union of Composers of the Kyrgyz SSR.

Manas: He was the national and heroic oral epic named after *Manas*, a legendary Kyrgyz *baatyr* or hero. The epic is a trilogy, each part is named after its hero: the first part, *Manas*, recites the life and times of the hero; the second part, *Semetei*, is about *Manas*'s son; and the last part, *Seitek*, tells the story of *Manas*'s grandson. The recorded version of Sayakbai Karalayev contains 500,553 poetic lines. The scholars of *Manas Epos* extend three main hypothesis regarding its origins: *Manas* emerged as a leader against the Uygur enemies in the eighth century A. D. (M. O. Auezov, *Kirgizskaia narodnaia geroicheskaia poema "Manas"* Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1961, and A. N. Bernshtam, *Epoha vozniknoveniia kirgizskogo eposa "Manas"*, Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1968); he became the leader of the Kyrgyz against the Kara-Kytai between the eighth and eleventh centuries A. D. (B. M. Junusaliyev, *Manas*, Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1958); and the epos renders the historical events between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries A. D. to reflect the mythical past (V. M. Zhirmunshkii, *Narodnyi geroicheskii epos*, Moscow: 1962). The consensus among the scholars of the Epos tells the story of *Manas* unifying the Kyrgyz tribes and establishing the first Kyrgyz state. *Manas* has always been significant for the Kyrgyz people because it has been seen as the depository of Kyrgyz history, culture, ancient foreign relations, and perhaps most importantly the book of ethical conduct in society.

Masaliyev, Absamat (1933-2004): The first secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyz SSR between 1985 and 1991. He was born in Alysh *ail* of Osh *oblast*. He remained a hard-line communist cadre, successfully moved up the party ladder, and replaced Turdakun Usubaliyev in 1985. He was a fierce proponent of the communist system and the opponent of any political change until the very end. In 1990 at the first contested presidential elections, Askar Akaev, the president of the Academy of Sciences defeated him.

Okeyev, Tölömüsh (1936-): A film producer from Tong *ail* in Ysyk Köl *oblast*. Between 1965 and 1993, he produced a number of influential documentaries and feature films in the *Kyrgyzfilm* studios. His films, mostly in Russian) include *Nebo nashego detstva* (1967), *Poklonis' ognyu* (1972), *Krasnoye Yabloko* (1975) and *Ulan* (1977). He was the first secretary of the Union of Cinematographers of Kyrgyz SSR between 1988 and 1990. Despite his apolitical career during the Soviet era, he became an ambassador to Turkey and Israel after the independence.

Ryskulov, Muratbek (1904-): He was born in Karoi *ail* of Jungal *raion*. He is considered *the* Kyrgyz actor of the Soviet Theater. He learned to act on stage at the Kyrgyz National Drama Theater in Bishkek in 1936. He received many prestigious awards, among them the "Peoples' Hero of the Kyrgyz SSR," "Peoples' Actor of the USSR," and the "Lenin's Order."

Satylganov, Toktogul (1864-1933): The most prominent Kyrgyz *akyn* and a master of *aitysh*, born in Kushchu *ail* in Jalal Abad *oblast*. He mastered the komuz and began composing music at the age of twelve. His songs and *melodies* such as *Alymkan*, *Toguz kairyk*, *Ming kyial* and *Kyz kerbez* were the best examples of traditional music many Kyrgyz learned and admired. Many of his songs were translated into Russian and other languages of the USSR. He satirized the imperial administration with his satirical songs, and as a result was exiled to Siberia. He escaped from exile and supported the Bolsheviks against the injustices of the Tsarist regime. During the Basmachi rebellion, Toktogul's support of the revolution convinced many Kyrgyz to put down their arms against the Reds.

Tokonbayev, Aaly (1904-88): A writer and a poet, born in Chon Kaiyngdy *ail* in Chui *oblast*. He began his writing career in the 1920s and became the editor of the largest Kyrgyz-language newspaper Kyzyl Kyrgyzstan in 1927. He worked there until 1969 while serving as the editor of various publishing houses and magazines: the Kyrgyz section of *Tsentrizdat* in Moscow (1930-31); *Kyrgyzgossizdat* in Frunze (1931-36); and *Chalkan* magazine in Frunze (1955-56). He was also the chairman of the Union of Kyrgyz Writers of Kyrgyzstan between 1934 and 1949. His literary awards included the People's Poet of Kyrgyz SSR (1964) and the Hero of Socialist Labor (1974). His poems have been published in Kyrgyz, Russian and other languages of the USSR.

Turgunaliyev, Topchubek (1941-): A political leader from Temirgen Sai *ail* in Osh *oblast*. Between 1969 and 1975, he was the head of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the CPK, and between 1975 and 1980 the director of the Kyrgyz State Theater of Opera and Ballet.

Urazbekov, Abukadyr (1889-1938): The first chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz SSR. He was a revolutionary activist during the Basmachi rebellion. He was awarded with chairmanship as a result of his activism, but executed as an anti-Soviet nationalist.

Usubaliyev, Turdakun (1919-): The leader of the Kyrgyz SSR and the first secretary of the CPK between 1961 and 1985, born in Kochkor *ail* of Naryn *oblast*. He served the Soviet government as one of the most influential apparatchiks. He worked as the editor of the *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan* between 1955 and 1956. He wrote about the Soviet "transformation" policy as the best possible modernization of the "backwards" country of the Kyrgyz people. He was a loyal follower of the "internationalization" (resulted in Russification) of the Kyrgyz SSR. His cooperation with Moscow brought industrialization projects to the republic, making him a respected leader. Ousted by the Mikhail Gorbachev government, he returned to the politics as a member of the Jogorku Kengesh after independence. He is a prolific writer of memoirs and essays.

Vita

Ali F. Igmen was born in Bursa, Turkey. He moved to the United States in 1980 to study International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. After receiving a Master of Public and International Affairs degree, he worked in Istanbul, Houston, Texas and Portland, Oregon as an international commodities trader. He also wrote a weekly editorial column for *Bursa Hakimiyet* newspaper. In 1992 he returned to academia to study Central Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Washington. In 1993, he earned a Master of Arts in Near Eastern Languages and Civilization. He taught numerous language and history courses in Osh and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and in Seattle, Washington. He also worked as a staff advisor at the Language Learning Center, and as an undergraduate advisor at the History Department of the University of Washington. In pursuit of his research, he received numerous grants awards and fellowships from various institutions, including Fulbright-Hays, Social Science Research Council, Foreign Language and Area Studies and United States Information Agency. He studied Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik and Russian languages. He served on numerous committees at the University of Washington, such as Long-Range Planning Committee and Graduate Liaison Committee. He also worked as an elected Graduate Senator. Since 1993, he presented papers in ten scholarly conferences such as Middle East Studies and Central Eurasian Studies Conference. In 2004 he earned a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Washington in Russian, Soviet and Central Asian History.