

CHAPTER FOUR

Immodest *Stiliagi* and Labor-Shirking *Kelins*: Entangled Soviet and Central Asian Discourses on Gender, Youth, and Consumption, 1955-1985

In January of 1959, the Kyrgyz-language Soviet journal *Chalkan* published a satirical text presented as a letter from an elderly reader living in the remote and mountainous Tian Shan region of Kyrgyzstan. In this text, as was typical of many satires in the Central Asian Soviet press during this period, the perspective of an exaggeratedly naïve and old-fashioned village woman was adopted in order to comment on tensions between modern life and traditionalism, between youth and the older generation. In the decades following the Second World War, youth culture and its Western-oriented, consumerist tendencies had grown into a subject of concern throughout the Soviet Union, both within the arena of official rhetoric, which became to a large extent fixated on and anchored by the wartime experience, and simultaneously among certain members of the older generation whose sense of self and community had been forged in an atmosphere of hardship and sacrifice. From this perspective, the newfound comforts and luxuries enjoyed but not adequately earned or appreciated by the younger generation carried with them the danger of moral degeneration, and young people's preoccupation with selfish consumerism threatened to overwhelm the Soviet virtues of labor and civic responsibility.

In the case of this particular satire, titled "Where is my daughter going?" (*Kyzym kaida barat?*), the perspective is that of an aging Kyrgyz woman who seems unfamiliar with both the Russian language and the modern Soviet life in the big cities. Her folksy unworldliness is signaled by her use of the rural Kyrgyz pronunciation "Boronzó" to refer to the republic's capital city of Frunze. The ignorance of this character is, to be sure, overstated for comic effect. When her daughter describes her new husband as "*sympatichnyi*," Russian slang for "attractive," the old woman remarks, "Since *Sympatichnyi* isn't a

Kyrgyz name, I thought her husband must be of a different nation [Kyrg. *ulut*].”¹ The writer evidently assumed that the journal’s readers would be more sophisticated and knowledgeable than this caricatured village woman and, at the very least, understand the Russian phrases to which she reacts with bewilderment. Nevertheless, the chief purpose of this text is neither to ridicule her backwardness and ignorance nor to present it as a foil for the progressive cultural changes that had occurred under Soviet rule. Instead, the voice of this elderly traditionalist is invoked in service of a Soviet critique of the shallowness, inauthenticity, and consumerist excesses of contemporary youth. On its own, this fact would not be remarkable in the context of the post-war generational anxieties described above. But in a rather extraordinary turn for a text published in an official journal during the Khrushchev era, this Soviet critique of dissolute youth consumerism bleeds over into specifically Central Asian ambivalences about the effects of urban influence and Russification more generally.

“Before my daughter left for the city,” the story begins, “all of the old women used to say that she was an exemplary girl [*mykty kyz*].” But after finishing primary school, this young woman, named Baaly, had moved to Frunze to attend university. By the time she returned to her home village (*aiyl*) on holiday just one year later, she had undergone a striking transformation:

How could I not recognize my own daughter! Her black hair, which used to reach down to her waist, was gone, sheared bare, and in its place remained one bunch done up like a horse’s tail, which seemed to have been dyed completely blonde [*sap-sary kylyp boiotup algan eken*]. When I said, “Eh, my daughter, why isn’t your hair black?” and she answered, “*Mamochka* [Rus.], they say black hair doesn’t suit my complexion,” what was I to do? But it wasn’t this that upset me. My daughter’s earlier aspirations had completely changed. She turned up her nose with displeasure at her own home, which had grown larger in the meantime. She used the words “*temno*” [Rus., dark] and “*syryst*” [Rus. *syrost’*, dampness or dankness] about our house. What does this mean?

The sketched illustrations accompanying this story indicate some of the implied content of Baaly’s dramatic transformation: prior to leaving home she is shown with a pair of long braids and dressed in “traditional” Kyrgyz style, with a dark vest over an ankle-length white dress. After her year in Frunze,

¹ Zhaparkul Alybaev, “Kyzym kaida barat?,” *Chalkan* no. 1 (Jan. 1959): 6.

though, she sports a ponytail, a European-style knee-length skirt, and a handbag (Figure 4.1). As with her shorn and dyed hair, these changes in external appearance are linked in the text to tactlessness, a disconnection from the virtues fostered by family and community, and an inability to properly enter into the social world of the village of her birth. In her impractical attire, for instance, Baaly struggles to keep up with her mother during a walk through the countryside to the home of a childhood friend, and as a guest there, displays a shocking lack of proper etiquette, haughtily calling the napkin offered to her “*graznyi* [Rus. *griaznyi*, dirty].”

The deference to fashion, the preoccupation with appearances, the language peppered with slang and informalities, the brazen and antisocial behavior – all of these were frequently presented in Soviet satire as the symptoms of a youth culture that had become increasingly corrupted by consumerism, materialistic frivolity, and the allure of Western styles and ways of life. Throughout the Soviet Union in the post-war period, the figure of the *stiliaga*, the youthful “style-seeker” or “hipster,” was targeted for condemnation and ridicule in the official press. Such individuals were branded as shallow, spoiled, and self-absorbed, consummate consumers who slavishly followed Western trends and cultivated a showy personal style that was incomprehensible or even offensive to the older generation. As Alexei Yurchak has described in the Russian context, the Soviet press during this period relentlessly attacked *stiliagi* as “deviationists, bourgeois sympathizers, and uneducated loafers.”² *Stiliagi* were characterized as laughable in their unconventional styles but also as morally debased, prioritizing individual acquisitiveness over social responsibility – the embodiment of the dangers of excessive and incorrect consumption that were warned against in normative Soviet discussions of appropriate consumer behavior.³

² Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171-172.

³ The issue of “excessive” consumption and Soviet attitudes toward consumerism are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.



Figure 4.1. Illustrations accompanying the satire “Where is my daughter going?” The images show a young Kyrgyz woman before and after a year attending university in the republic capital of Frunze (modern-day Bishkek). Source: Zhaparkul Alybaev, “Kyzym kaida barat?,” *Chalkan* no. 1 (Jan. 1959): 6.

Where the Kyrgyz satire of Baaly and her mother begins to diverge from the Soviet Union-wide discourse about the pernicious influence of consumerism on youth culture, however, is in the way that Baaly’s degeneration is not attributed to contact with “the West” so much as with the Russian or Russified milieu of the Kyrgyz capital city. Her new, distinctive slang is specifically Russian slang, and the

community from which she excludes herself is not only an industrious Soviet community but also a culturally Kyrgyz one. Her dyed blonde hair demonstrates her consumerist artificiality and shallowness, but also signifies a kind of de-ethnicization. When her mother comes to visit her briefly in Frunze, she notes that Baaly's manner of dress differs from that of many other young women at the institute who "wore Kyrgyz-style [*kyrgyzcha*] dresses with a flounced hem," and whose appearance she characterizes as "warm" or "pleasant" (*zhyluu*). When she arrives home in the village, Baaly not only refuses to eat the Kyrgyz food her mother has prepared for her, but requests a Russian dish, beef stroganoff, in its place. Eventually, she elects to marry a prototypical *stiliaga* youth, "with hair falling down the back of his neck, wearing wide pants, and bare-headed," whom she introduces to her mother in an amalgam of Kyrgyz and Russian: "*Mama, taanyshyb koi, moi muzh.*" At their wedding, they perform "the American dance 'boogie-boogie,'" one of the diagnostic markers in Soviet satire of the wildness and degeneracy of Western-influenced *stiliagi* culture, but also practice the Russian tradition in which the newlyweds kiss to shouts of "*gor'ko.*" The equal bewilderment and alienation with which the elderly narrator describes the hallmarks of *stiliagi* culture on the one hand and the trappings of an increasingly Russian-influenced urban lifestyle on the other is left implicit, but is unmistakable nevertheless.

Within the context of an official Soviet rhetoric that, while careful to avoid explicitly urging the adoption of Russian habits by Central Asians, tended to hail cross-cultural influences like these as salutary evidence of "internationalism" and the "friendship of peoples," the way in which this text links Russification to *stiliagi* culture and moral degeneration is, to put it mildly, off-message.⁴ But what is even more remarkable is that Baaly is most objectionable when she speaks not only in Russian but also in "Soviet," employing the rhetoric of darkness and poor hygiene that was ubiquitous in Soviet critiques

⁴ For an analysis of Soviet rhetoric praising cross-cultural influences in private and domestic life, see Adrienne Lynn Edgar, "Marriage, Modernity, and the 'Friendship of Nations': Interethnic Intimacy in Post-War Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Central Asian Survey* 26/4 (December 2007): 581-599.

of rural Central Asian life.⁵ As we saw in Chapter 3, in numerous didactic texts published in Central Asian-language journals of the 1950s and 1960s, an urban outsider would reflect on the home interiors of villagers with dismay and distaste, citing precisely the features of darkness and dirtiness that Baaly invokes in her Russian-language interjections. But whereas those texts posit the urban realm as the vanguard of a superior, more modern way of life, here that hierarchical relationship is destabilized, if not turned entirely on its head. It is possible to read more than a little irony into the elderly mother's response to Baaly's request for beef stroganoff: "Forgive an ignorant [lit. dark] person [*karanggy kishini kechirib koi*], but I've never heard of such a dish." To be sure, the story makes both Baaly and her mother into comic stereotypes, but the implication seems to be that there is a kind of noble simplicity and honesty in the mother's "ignorance," and that it is a far more forgivable fault than Baaly's abrasive disdain, if it is a fault at all. Even as the Khrushchev-era state, and even other Kyrgyz-language journals, were utilizing exactly these discourses of health and hygiene, ignorance and enlightenment to urge the modernization of rural life in Central Asia and elsewhere, they are being invoked here with a satirical twist, denoting instead the shallowness and snobbishness of the urbanized observer that have taken the place of the feelings of warmth and gratitude that are owed to one's elders, family, and ethnic community.

The satire of Baaly and her mother, while representing an unusually trenchant example of this genre, is far from unique within the Soviet Central Asian press of the time. It was part of an anxious, contested, but pervasive conversation in the region that ran through the local-language satirical press from the late 1950s through the early 1980s. This conversation took the question of consumer culture and consumption practices as one of its primary points of concern. Differentiated consumer habits were deployed in satirical texts and images to represent, scrutinize, and critique changes in material culture,

⁵ Stephen Kotkin uses the phrase "speaking Bolshevik" to describe the ways that Russian workers in the 1930s incorporated official categories and terminologies into their speech and languages of identification. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

differences in urban and rural life, the transformation of gender roles, and the destabilized relationship between the older and younger generations in post-war Central Asian society. Like the didactic professional advice texts discussed in the previous chapter, Soviet Central Asian satire came to be thoroughly immersed in a matrix of local language, local associations, and local concerns, and in the process considerably widened the possibilities of public print discourse in Central Asia during the Soviet period. In particular, the antipathy toward consumer culture and the appeal to the values of an older generation in post-war official rhetoric seems to have lent legitimacy to Central Asian push-back against cultural “modernization” and Europeanization, which may have otherwise seemed contrary to Soviet ideals. It is conceivable that satirical critiques of *stiliagi* and dissolute youth culture may have been deliberately utilized by Central Asian writers and cartoonists as an officially acceptable façade that allowed more subversive messages to be smuggled into print. But often, what seems to have occurred instead is an entanglement of all-union and local values and assumptions. The “Soviet” and “Central Asian” aspects of the discourses of generational gap and consumer culture in many cases became so intermeshed as to appear organically linked or even indistinguishable.

Whatever the motivations of the writers, the content of the Central Asian satirical press during the post-war decades suggests a considerably broader, more flexible, and more locally specific range of permissible discourse under Soviet auspices than one might expect. Apart from its vindication of traditionalist values, perhaps the most salient feature of the Central Asian satirical press is its wide-ranging ambivalence and multivocality, the sheer diversity of views expressed under the rubric of what was ostensibly official Soviet rhetoric. Where official and local concerns firmly overlapped, as in the criticisms of *stiliagi* and out-of-control youth culture, a single viewpoint could be repeated frequently enough that it may be regarded as dominant within this forum. Yet there were other issues for which the discussion was more contested, where a wide variety of implications and shadings of meaning were possible – attitudes toward women’s new roles and personal styles, for example. It is significant,

moreover, that even contradictory positions on these issues tended to be expressed in a shared language, appealing to a common assemblage of images, associations, and values that were as often local as official in origin. In this sense, the significance of these texts lies less in their potential for the expression of specifically subversive points of view than in the manifestation of a shared set of tropes, symbols, and images, constituted out of the interaction of Soviet and Central Asian rhetorics, which could serve as a common field for discussion and dispute in post-war Central Asian society. In short, they demonstrate the possibility for the emergence of an officially influenced but localized and locally resonant Soviet Central Asian culture, and one that acted not as a set of rigid, externally imposed cultural forms, but rather as a living medium for social contestation and debate.

Local-language satire in Soviet Central Asia

Like their better-known Russian-language counterpart *Krokodil*, the Soviet satirical journals of the Central Asian republics (including *Chalkan* in the Kyrgyz SSR and *Mushtum* in the Uzbek SSR) were nominally organs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and as such might be understood as representative of or at least in line with an “official” point of view. This understanding is not entirely incorrect, but does require a few points of qualification. First, as in the case of *Krokodil*, these journals’ satirical function meant that they were permitted to speak more critically and frankly than was typical in other registers of official Soviet discourse. In the majority of cases, the targets of satire were entirely “safe” and state-approved ones, made up of groups of people or phenomena that were already recognized as un-Soviet and subject to attack in official rhetoric: drunkards, fashion-obsessed youths, religious charlatans, obstructionist bureaucrats who had lost their connection to the working people, and so on. But even so, the constant foregrounding of the moral failings of Soviet citizens meant that satirical journals tended to undercut the optimistic, triumphalist tone favored in post-war Soviet rhetoric more generally. They served as one of the primary arenas in which uncomfortable social problems and

the embarrassing incongruities of daily life could be acknowledged and discussed in print. Moreover, as heavy-handed as Soviet satire could at times be, it utilized a set of genres and devices – poetry, fictional narratives, jokes, and satirical cartoons – that hinged on ambiguity and implication, in contrast to the straightforward didacticism and exhortation found elsewhere in the official press. This made it a unique medium for the exploration of tensions and ambivalences in state policy or official rhetoric. Finally, in the case of Central Asia, by the post-war period local-language journals only rarely translated and reprinted materials from *Krokodil* or the Moscow center. Instead, the overwhelming bulk of their content was generated within Central Asia, in Central Asian languages, for a Central Asian audience.⁶ If this content may in some ways be regarded as “official” in provenance, it was also strikingly focused on local life and local concerns.

As a result, even as Central Asian satirical journals drew on a shared Soviet discourse and set of officially endorsed goals, adapting their content to Moscow’s policy priorities of the moment, they were at the same time steeped in a distinctly local universe of symbols and associations, turns of phrase and proverbs, stock characters and locally recognizable settings. In some cases, this seems to have been an intentional strategy within the Soviet Central Asian press, intended to add local relevance and appeal to what were essentially official messages. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the traditional folk hero Nasreddin Afandi, who in the pre-revolutionary period had used his wits to get the better of kings and wise men, now appeared on the pages of the journal *Mushtum* to mock labor shirkers, *stiliagi*, and greedy Soviet shop attendants who cheated customers.⁷ But while the localization of Soviet discourse was something that could be actively encouraged by the party and state authorities, it would be a mistake to conclude that it constituted nothing more than tokenism, an inorganic juxtaposition of local “forms” and official

⁶ The Uzbek-language *Mushtum* began publishing some of its articles in Russian in 1959, but this lasted less than a year; afterward, satirical cartoons tended to be published with captions in both Uzbek and Russian, but otherwise all journal content was in Uzbek. For the Kyrgyz-language journal *Chalkan*, bilingual printing began in March 1963, but similarly had ended by 1967.

⁷ See, for example, “Afandi latifalari,” *Mushtum* no. 11 (Jun. 1965): 9.

“content.” As will be seen, local values and preoccupations were not kept from seeping in to the discussion, at times even in ways that worked contrary to the spirit of state rhetoric. In conjunction with the already ambivalent Soviet attitude toward consumption and youth culture, this opened up surprisingly expansive opportunities for the exploration, within a Soviet Central Asian public forum, of topics that might be regarded as too sensitive to address within official discourse – the blurred lines between modernity and inauthenticity, cultural change and cultural loss, defiance of tradition and amorality.

One final necessary caveat about Central Asian satirical journals as a historical source is that these journals were far from universally read by Central Asians, and it would be difficult to establish that they exerted a strong influence on the thinking of their readers. Even with much better knowledge of how these texts were read, and by whom, than is currently available, the question of their impact on belief and behavior would remain murky. Nevertheless, I would argue that two significant types of inferences can be drawn from these sources. First, purely from the standpoint of the production and publication of these texts, they can be used to establish the horizons of possibility for Soviet Central Asian public discourse – what could be said in print under the auspices of the “official” press. The expansion and at some points awkward distension of what could be incorporated under the umbrella of “Sovietness” is one of the recurring themes of Soviet rule in Central Asia in the post-war period, and the satirical press vividly illustrates the elasticity of these boundaries. How this particular corner of public discourse resolved or agonized over tensions between local values and Soviet ideals is, I would argue, already interesting and revealing, regardless of its broader applicability. Second, I have adopted the working hypothesis that these texts, for all the idiosyncrasies of their production and their medium, can be interpreted as reflecting topics of broader local concern and interest, especially where they diverge from what is regarded as normal Soviet rhetoric for this era. The continuous presence of a relatively small number of editors and cartoonists over the course of this period, with many of them staffing the

journals for a decade or more, means that their individual eccentricities may have been amplified in a way that skews the cultural representativeness of these texts. (There are a handful of cartoonists, to give one example, who seem to have gravitated toward subject matter that afforded them the opportunity to draw pictures of curvaceous and scantily clad women, possibly for reasons other than a sense of journalistic obligation.) Nevertheless, without arguing that the preoccupations of these journals directly correspond with those of Central Asian society at large, we can conclude from their deployment of locally specific rhetoric and imagery that they were to some extent in dialogue with and responsive to broader social and cultural discourses in the region. They thus highlight some of the intensely local, culturally specific ways that Soviet rhetoric was digested and refracted, demonstrating the possibilities for the entanglement, and at certain points mutual reinforcement, of Soviet and Central Asian discourses.

The post-war generation gap and the rehabilitation of the Central Asian family

In order to understand the extent to which the satire of Baaly and others like it represented a disruption of the Soviet norm, it is necessary to appreciate both changes in Soviet rhetoric by the post-war period and the specificities of state policy and ideology in Central Asia. Already during the so-called “Great Retreat” from cultural revolution during the latter part of the Stalin era, Soviet rhetoric had begun to accommodate more socially conservative and traditionalist attitudes than it had during the 1920s and early 1930s. If previously the “new” had invariably been favorably contrasted to the “old,” the youth to their elders, a radical revision of gender norms to traditional family structures, after the middle of the 1930s, state policy swung toward a reassertion of authority, social order, pre-revolutionary aesthetic values, and familial hierarchy.⁸ Two issues that were particularly affected were

⁸ Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc: New York, 1946).

generation and gender. The younger generation lost its position in Soviet thought as the vanguard of revolutionary transformation and became instead the target of supervision and discipline in schools and universities, while policies toward marriage and divorce underwent a pro-natalist retrenchment.⁹ Within Central Asia, though, the state's continued high-priority struggle against traditional practices like veiling and forced marriage for women meant that this reversal had less impact on official rhetoric and practice than it may have in other parts of the Soviet Union. One of the most frequently cited aspects of the "Great Retreat" in Soviet family policy, for instance, was the tightening of divorce laws and a new rhetoric stigmatizing frivolous divorce, intended to reinforce the stability of the family unit. A 1951 report from the Supreme Court of the Uzbek SSR, however, maintained a careful distinction between divorces in Uzbekistan initiated by the husband, which were regarded as irresponsible and socially disruptive, and divorces initiated by the wife, which were held up as a necessary means of escape from the abusive and coercive situations created by Central Asian family practices.¹⁰ Central Asian values, and above all traditional family hierarchies and gender norms, continued to be branded, as they were in the state campaign against veiling in the 1920s, as potentially dangerous, reactionary forces, with young women portrayed in the press and literary accounts as victims at the hands of their parents, husbands, and mothers-in-law.

As early as the post-Stalin 1950s and 1960s, however, the local-language press was beginning to hint at a more sympathetic attitude toward the traditional order of the Central Asian family, affirming surprisingly conservative notions about familial roles and the authority of the older generation over the younger. Exactly when and why this shift occurred is unclear. In part, it may have been a local manifestation of a more general turn throughout the Soviet Union in the post-war period toward the sacralization of the wartime generation and its experiences. To the extent that World War II came to be

⁹ Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*, 214; Mie Nakachi, "Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union, 1944-1955," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2008).

¹⁰ GARF, F. R-9492, Op. 1a, d. 639, 1-12.

memorialized as the climactic moment of Soviet achievement and communal belonging, in Central Asia as elsewhere in the USSR, it is in some ways unsurprising that the older generation could now be defined as the definitively “Soviet” generation, and the ostensibly untested, lackadaisical post-war youth regarded with suspicion and anxiety. By the Brezhnev era, Soviet culture and public discourse had grown increasingly backward-looking, anchored by constant references to the Second World War, and this placed the generation born after the war in a strained position and legitimated the older generation's suspicion of unfamiliar youth lifestyles and a rapidly changing, Western-influenced culture.

The specific volte-face on Central Asian family and gender norms may also have been connected to the outcomes of the wartime experience, although in a more oblique way. Paul Stronski has argued that anti-Nazi propaganda produced for a Central Asian audience during World War II eventually came to leverage local cultural resonances in an effort to “particularize the war for Central Asians.” While wartime propaganda in Russia appealed to Russian culture and nationalism, in Central Asia it graphically described the potential consequences of the Nazi conquest of Central Asian peoples, with imagery of the enslavement of children, the slaughter of elderly parents and grandparents, and the rape of Central Asian women.¹¹ In this way, Stronski argues, propagandists “tried to tie traditional notions of gender and the Uzbek family, which they had attempted to undermine only a few short years before, to the Soviet Union as a whole.”¹² The experience of the war may have meant that the Soviet state was able to lay claim to a position not as a threat to the Central Asian family unit, as it had been perceived during the 1920s and 1930s unveiling campaign, but rather as its defender. While the effectiveness of this propaganda tactic is uncertain, it represented a relatively novel effort within state rhetoric to appeal to Central Asian values and frame them as compatible with or even reinforced by the Soviet system, and this notion finds powerful echoes in the Soviet Central Asian press of the subsequent decades.

¹¹ An example of this genre is found in “Pis'mo boitsam-uzbekam ot uzbekskogo naroda,” *Pravda*, 31 Oct. 1942.

¹² Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 79, 84.

Finally, it is possible that the slackening of Soviet criticism of Central Asian family structures derived from a sense that, by the late 1950s, Soviet policy had already achieved its chief goals in relation to gender and family in the region – above all, the elimination of the veil from public life and the integration of Central Asian women into education and labor outside of the home.¹³ As both Marianne Kamp and Anna Temkina have observed, the Soviet policy of “women’s liberation” in Central Asia focused on expanding women’s participation in public life, and was quite successful on these terms. But policy-makers were considerably less interested in (or, naturally, capable of) intervening in private life and the practices of gender and sexual regulation within the family.¹⁴ The equality of women in the public sphere, the right to work and be educated, and the prohibition of practices like veiling, bride price, and coerced marriage continued to be affirmed through the entire post-war Soviet period and constituted non-negotiable elements of the public discourse in Central Asia, even in the sometimes unorthodox local-language press. But on a whole array of other issues less explicitly targeted by Soviet policy – hierarchical relationships and obligations within the family, differentiated roles in married life, standards of modesty and deferential behavior for young people and especially young women – the public discussion of the late 1950s and 1960s grew increasingly ambivalent and two-sided, in some areas, as we shall see, even skewing closer to something resembling Central Asian traditionalism than to the rhetoric of Soviet officialdom.

An especially revealing gauge of the post-war rapprochement between Soviet and Central Asian rhetoric concerning both generation and gender can be found in the evolving uses to which the image of the Central Asian mother-in-law (Uzbek *qaynona*, Kyrgyz *kaiyn ene*) was put between the 1920s and

¹³ By 1950, at least, the veil was rare enough in Tashkent’s “New City” to draw comment. See Zulfiya, “Vstrecha s zhenshchinoi v parandzhe,” *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 19 April 1950. See also Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 194.

¹⁴ Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 215-216; Anna Temkina, “Gendernaia Modernizatsiia Po-Sovetski vs. Traditsionnye Stsenarii Seksual'noi zhizni [Soviet-Style Gender Modernization vs. Traditional Scenarios of Sexual Life],” *Ab Imperio*, vol. 3 (2008): 281.

1970s. Early Soviet Central Asian texts typically portrayed the mother-in-law as one of the chief forces in the oppression of the newly married young woman (Uzb. and Kyrg. *kelin*), requiring her to behave deferentially, constraining her from pursuing education and work outside of the home, and treating her like a servant within the family. Mothers-in-law were also represented as frequent accomplices in criminalized practices like the forced or underage marriages of young women. By the post-war period, however, an increasingly sympathetic image of the Central Asian mother-in-law had begun to appear in public discourse. A 1953 short story by Uzbek author Rahmat Faizi, for instance, contrasts one character who fits the old image of the excessively critical mother-in-law, harping on her daughter-in-law's every shortcoming, with a more fair-minded mother-in-law who not only loves and respects her *kelin*, but also facilitates her education and efforts to become a mechanic by sharing in the housework and looking after the children during the day.¹⁵ The suggestion that traditional Central Asian family structures and relationships, including the practice of moving into the husband's home and living with his parents, might be compatible with and even reinforce the high-priority Soviet goal of women's education and labor (in the traditionally male-gendered occupation of mechanic, no less) is quite startling in light of the polarized rhetoric of traditionalism and modernity that had proliferated in the region in the 1920s and 1930s.

As anxieties over youth consumption habits grew more acute over the course of the post-war decades, Soviet Central Asian rhetoric shifted even further toward vindication of the mother-in-law and, increasingly, problematization of the figure of the *kelin*. The daughter-in-law was no longer predominantly presented as a progressive young woman striving to be freed from traditional constraints in order to become educated and engage in socially useful labor. This image did not disappear, but alongside it arose a competing image of the *kelin* as an irresponsible young consumer, self-absorbed and

¹⁵ Rakhmat Faizi, "Svekrov'," *Uzbekskie rasskazy*, ed. N. Vladimirova (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury im. Gafura Guliyama, 1967).

frivolous, who pushed back against tradition not in order to become a fully formed Soviet person but in order to shirk responsibility for housework and pursue bourgeois fashions and luxuries. A striking example of this can be found in a 1956 Kyrgyz satirical cartoon, which contrasts a “demure” or “obedient” (*elpek*) *kelin* before marriage, modestly attired and industriously doing housework while her future husband and mother-in-law look on approvingly, and the same young woman after marriage, who dresses in modern fashions and idly gazes at herself in a mirror while her elderly mother-in-law is forced to complete household chores in her place (Figure 4.2).¹⁶ The social pressures of Central Asian family life, requiring that a young woman prove her worth and demonstrate her willingness to serve her future family before marriage, are thus presented as a salutary force, restraining women from consumerist self-indulgence, rather than as an impediment to social progress. In a similar vein, a text in *Mushtum* from 1968 notes that while it is true that some mothers-in-law continuously find fault with “good,” “modest,” and “simple [*sodda*]” *kelins*, it may in some cases be the selfish and consumerist attitudes of the modern *kelin* that cause domestic ruptures: “Some young brides [*kelinchaklar*] look down on elderly people as having fallen behind the times [*turmushdan orqada qolgan*]. Chasing after new fashions, they are not equipped for the conditions in the family. ‘Surely the older people will run the household,’ they think. As a result, coldness and disharmony come into the family.”¹⁷ Just as in the satire “Where is my daughter going?”, the progressive rhetoric of the Communist party and the notion of the older generation as “backward” (*orqada qolgan*) are flagged as potentially dangerous in the hands of self-serving and presumptuous young people, and are reined in by the Central Asian social requirement to behave respectfully and deferentially toward one’s elders.

An even more dramatic upending of official rhetoric appears in an Uzbek satirical cartoon published in 1969, but in this case, it is the Soviet rhetoric of gender equality that is cast into doubt by

¹⁶ Image by E. Plotnikov, *Chalkan* no. 10 (Oct. 1956): 3.

¹⁷ Muzayyana Alaviya, “Uyida rohati yo’qning, ko’chada farog’ati yo’q,” *Mushtum* no. 24 (Dec. 1968): 8.

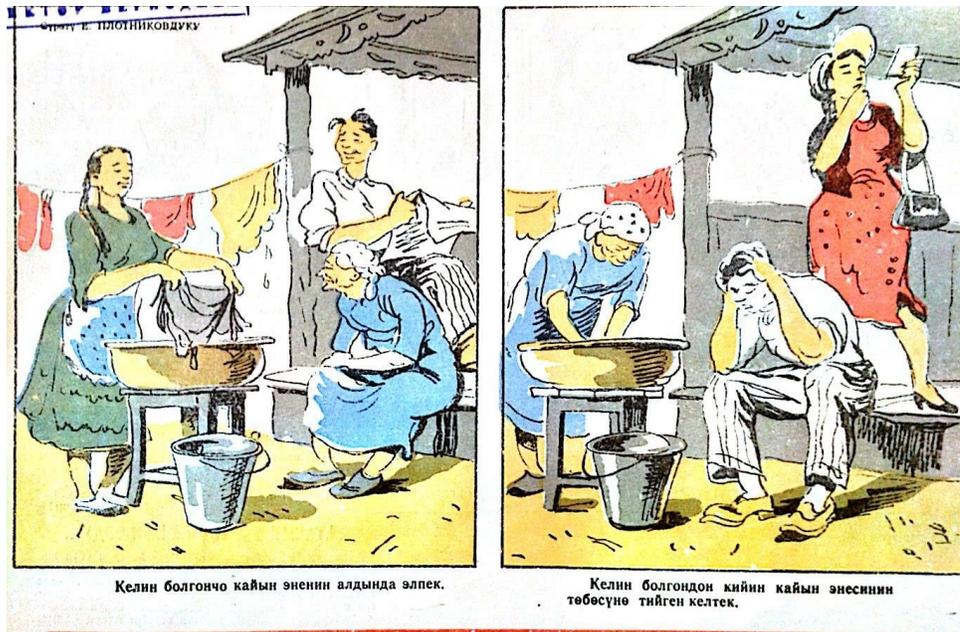


Figure 4.2. From obedient *kelin* to self-absorbed consumer. Caption: “Before becoming a *kelin*, she is obedient before her mother-in-law. After becoming a *kelin*, she is like a club against her mother-in-law’s head.” Source: Image by E. Plotnikov, *Chalkan* no. 10 (Oct. 1956): 3.

association with a dissolute member of the younger generation. A young woman – her bourgeois, un-Soviet character symbolized, as before, by the activity of applying cosmetics while looking in a mirror – refuses her mother-in-law's request to finish chopping carrots by saying, “Let my husband finish cutting them. We have equal rights [*huquqimiz teng*]” (Figure 4.3).¹⁸ It cannot be said that the cartoon overtly rejects the idea of women’s “equal rights,” but it does propose that the young woman is mistaken in her belief that equality of rights entails a literally equal division of labor in household tasks – half of the carrots to be cut by the wife, and half by the husband. At the very least, the text implies that to refer to gender equality in an attempt to reduce one’s load of housework is a misuse of the concept, contrary to the Soviet values of diligence and hard work; perhaps more importantly, it invalidates this rhetoric when coming from the mouth of a certain kind of young woman, blocking attempts to appeal to “equality” in

¹⁸ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1969): 13.



Figure 4.3. “Equal rights” or labor-shirking? Caption: – “Cut the rest of the carrots, daughter-in-law.” – “Let my husband cut these ones, we have equal rights.” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1969): 13.

an effort to challenge the *kelin's* place within the family. The perceived idleness and irresponsibility of contemporary Central Asian youth, closely tied in press representations and rhetoric to their consumerist tendencies, made it possible within a Central Asian public forum to critique, constrict, and hold at bay points of Soviet ideology that might disrupt traditional family hierarchies.

Increasingly from the 1950s on, then, locally specific ideas about familial hierarchies and gender roles – especially the expectation of the *kelin's* heavy participation in housework – were reformulated as extensions of Soviet values: industriousness, love of labor, even, in a twisted way, egalitarianism. A particularly mind-bending piece of advice literature on Central Asian family life, written in 1960 by the prominent Uzbek writer G’afur G’ulom and published in the women’s journal *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari*,

chided young Central Asian women for “forgetting about equality in rights” by demanding that their husbands share in the housework: “If a *kelin* has finished a higher education and her husband’s education is more lowly, in this situation many of our young brides become boastful [*kekayibroq ketadilar*]. Forgetting about equality in rights, they belittle their husbands. They say, ‘You may work, but I work too. Wash your own laundry, take care of your child yourself.’”¹⁹ While the above-mentioned cartoon had merely sought to preempt the disruptive potential of the idea of “equal rights,” this text goes further, attempting to leverage “gender equality” to reinforce conventional family dynamics – the necessity for wives to show adequate respect to their husbands, raise children, and participate in housework. It would be easy to conclude that this apparent distortion of official Soviet rhetoric was deliberate, a calculated strategy to slip Central Asian traditionalism and patriarchal family relations into print by concealing them inside the Trojan horse of the Communist Party’s favorite catch phrases and targets of critique, and this possibility should not be ignored. But the sheer ubiquity and consistency of the notion that *kelins* were being un-Soviet by shirking household labor and disrespecting their mothers-in-law and husbands, alongside and in spite of the continued celebration of women’s education and public labor, suggests that something more profound and unpremeditated was taking place. This is the process I am describing as rhetorical entanglement, in which images, tropes, and other signifiers accumulated new attachments and associations as they moved between all-union and Central Asian contexts without ever fully surrendering their original content.

Consumer culture and the problem of the contemporary youth

Concerns about dissolute, socially irresponsible youth in the post-war Soviet press tended to fixate on the figure of the outrageously dressed, Western-looking *stiliaga*, and the Central Asian-language press was no different. Even when not identified by name as *stiliagi*, the invariable indicator of

¹⁹ G’afur, G’ulom, “Ba’zi oilaviy gaplar...”, *O’zbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* no. 8 (Aug. 1960): 30.

problematic youths was a specific set of consumption habits: unconventional dress and hairstyles, a preoccupation with foreign fashions and imported goods, and accessorization with the trappings of their debauched forms of sociability – alcohol, cigarettes, cosmetics, fashion magazines, and radios or tape players playing rock music. On the one hand, these elements became the shorthand way of visually establishing the stock character of the “*stiliaga*” or “consumerist youth” in Soviet satires, somewhat analogous to how a top hat and monocle might be used to quickly establish the stock character of “capitalist.” But rather than merely serving as caricatured identifying features, these objects and practices embodied the crux of the problem with contemporary youth from the perspective of the Soviet press. These young people’s consumption habits were, according to this view, in themselves irresponsible, disruptive, and offensive; moreover, they were causally connected to a whole array of other moral faults. Central Asian texts frequently used the Russian neologism *stiliagi*, “style-seekers,” to label consumerist youths, but they also employed a variety of more morally expressive local terms like the Uzbek *erkatoylar*, “spoiled children,” and *taqasaltanglar*, “idlers.”²⁰ A common trope in the Central Asian press during this period represented *stiliagi* youth as labor shirkers and parasites on the older generation, siphoning off their parents’ and in some cases grandparents’ incomes, especially pensions, to feed their consumption habits.²¹ A consumerist interest in particular fashions, goods, and music was thus not just a symbol but an integral component of the shortcomings of this subset of contemporary youth – their self-centeredness, irresponsibility, laziness, and disrespect for elders and community norms.

As noted in the previous chapter, Soviet rhetoric during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras did not comprehensively pathologize consumer culture, but instead hailed increasing interest in consumer novelties, within limits, as a benchmark of both the population’s prosperity and its rising level of

²⁰ See, for instance, A. Zamonali, “Erkatoylar,” *Mushtum* no. 4 (Feb. 1971): 5.

²¹ For example, Image by S. Ishenov, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1969): 6; image by B. Zhumabaev, *Chalkan* no. 8 (Aug. 1977): 9; image by S. Ishenov, *Chalkan* no. 11 (Nov. 1977): 7.

sophistication and aesthetic discernment under socialism. Within this post-war rhetoric of material abundance and the shift in emphasis from purely physical needs to social and cultural ones, even previously disparaged elements of consumer culture such as the pursuit of constantly changing fashions could be framed, as Susan E. Reid puts it, “not only as legitimate, but even as an entitlement.”²² Nevertheless, there remained a sternly affirmed (if not always clearly delineated) distinction between consumer behavior that was “rational,” conscientious, and tasteful, and the rampant individualism and acquisitiveness that plagued the consumer culture of the bourgeois West. Soviet fashion was characterized by simple beauty, functionality, and suitability to the age, gender, and physical features of the individual person; Western fashion, at least in the extreme form characteristic of Western youth culture, was outrageous, aggressively unconventional, and offensive to social norms and popular tastes.²³ Western youths were held up in the Soviet press as cautionary tales, as “victims of fashion” distinguished equally by their aesthetically offensive clothing choices and the disdain these choices evinced for standards of politeness and public decorum. A 1967 Uzbek article, for example, published photographs taken on the streets of New York City showing young women dressed in bug-eyed sunglasses and tight-fitting fringed leather skirts.²⁴ American youths like these, the article asserted, “chew gum on the streets and in crowded squares, perform shameless dances, and consider respect for elders, self-control, and a sense of restraint to be things that are contrary to freedom [*erkinlikka zid narsa deb tushunadilar*].”

As the language of this condemnation suggests, the social norms and aesthetics that *stiliagi* were accused of flouting through their consumption habits were presented as not only Soviet but also Central Asian ones. A particularly vehement Uzbek-language satirical poem from 1965 drew attention

²² Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Jan-Jun. 2006): 248.

²³ See Chapter 3.

²⁴ “Moda qurbonlari,” *Guliston* no. 4 (Apr. 1967): 31.

to the “short dresses and wide trousers” preferred by *stiliagi* youth, then lambasted them in terms heavily laden with both Soviet and Central Asian moral disapproval: “glittering on the outside, moldy at the heart,” “shameless and indecent,” “without a speck of dignity,” “spoiled and idle.”²⁵ The poem’s first stanza alone describes *stiliagi* using three different Uzbek-language epithets that could roughly be translated as “shameless” – *behayo*, lacking modesty or decency; *besharm*, lacking shame or embarrassment; and *beor*, lacking morals or respect. The poem ends by issuing a warning that appeals to a righteous community that could ambiguously be construed either as all-Soviet or as more specifically ethnic and cultural: “You say, ‘This is a time when the nation [e/] will say nothing, whatever we do,’ / But he who angers the people [xalq] will have a bad end!” As will be discussed in more detail below, the language and imagery accompanying criticisms of female *stiliagi*, which tended to fixate on issues on modesty and bodily exposure, provided an especially overt case of the merging of Central Asian concerns into Soviet rhetoric. A poem in the Uzbek press unsubtly titled “Why are you not ashamed before us? A question to some *stiliaga* girls,” for instance, decried the degenerate female subject’s partially exposed breasts, short mini skirt, and disarrayed hair (Figure 4.4).²⁶ In this case, the Soviet critique of dissolute excess and the traditionalist Central Asian critique of female immodesty overlap to the point that they are nearly indistinguishable from one another.

A corollary of the intense disapproval and anxiety over the disruptive effects of contemporary youth culture in the Soviet Central Asian press was that elderly Uzbeks and Kyrgyz increasingly came to stand in not for the backwardness and stubborn intransigence of traditional ways of life, but rather for a set of values that were posited as simultaneously Soviet and rooted in traditional Central Asia virtues: hard work and love of labor, self-restraint and modesty in personal habits, respectfulness and grace in social relationships. If the divergent values of the older and younger generations were almost invariably

²⁵ Sobir Abdulla, “Stilyaglar,” *Mushtum* no. 24 (Dec. 1965): 7.

²⁶ Fathiddin Nasriddinov, “Nega Bizdan Uyalmaysiz? Ba’zi stilyaga qiz-juvonlarga savol,” *Mushtum* no. 6 (Mar. 1971): 10.



Figure 4.4. “Why are you not ashamed before us? A question to some *stiliaga* girls.” Source: Fathiddin Nasriddinov, “Nega Bizdan Uyalmaisiz?,” *Mushtum* (May 1971): 10.

represented by differences in fashion, hairstyle, and physical comportment, it is significant that the virtuous elders were very often represented not in the Europeanized dress of post-war Soviet respectability, but instead in elements of traditional Central Asian costume.²⁷ A typical Uzbek satirical cartoon from 1968 contrasts garish and colorful *stiliagi*, engaged in angular dance movements and accessorized by alcohol, cigarettes, and a blaring tape recorder, with a white-bearded man, dressed monochromatically, wearing an Uzbek skull cap (*do'ppi*), and standing with a straight-backed, restrained

²⁷ To a large extent, this “traditional” costume was in fact a product of the Soviet period, as discussed in Chapter 1. But the degree of its resemblance to pre-revolutionary dress notwithstanding, it was consistently identified with Central Asian ethnic identity and traditional culture in the post-war period, and tended to be more commonly in use among groups identified as traditionalist, especially the rural population and the older generations. It is unambiguously being used to signify traditionalism and Central Asian ethnic distinctiveness in the post-war press.

pose (Figure 4.5).²⁸ The *stiliagi* here differ little from their counterparts in the contemporary Russian-language press, represented as disorderly and degenerate, but their antithesis is defined in a locally specific form, in terms of the virtues, styles of dress, and behaviors of the Central Asian older generation rather than by a generic figure of Soviet respectability.

The surprisingly seamless interplay of all-union and local concerns in these examinations of generational conflict comes through in a 1973 image in which an elderly, traditionally dressed Kyrgyz man is placed in juxtaposition to two fashionably dressed youths who display not only the degeneracy and tactlessness of which young people were accused in propaganda throughout the Soviet Union (drinking, smoking, and slouching insolently), but also a specific violation of Central Asian cultural values – one of them has carelessly dropped a piece of bread on the ground and is stepping on it.²⁹ The elderly man pleads with the youth that he should not trample the bread, in accordance with the reverence conferred on bread in Kyrgyz culture, but also with a Soviet and post-war abhorrence of wastefulness, especially the waste of food. The young man flippantly replies, “Nobody goes hungry anymore, grandfather [Kyrg. *aksakal*]” (Figure 4.6). This narrative is in many ways highly conventional for the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union: the younger generation, over-satiated with the abundance of the post-war decades and disdainful of any notion of hardship or labor, engages in wasteful consumerism, while the older generation stands as a bulwark of the Soviet values of humility and self-restraint. But in this case, the embodiment of these “Soviet” values is also standing in for a specifically Central Asian set of moral principles, and is identified by an ethnically distinctive mode of dress in contrast to the long hair and European-style suits of the youth.

Shifts in the Soviet Central Asian rhetoric surrounding generational differences, family, and gender norms were thus further amplified and legitimated in the context of the state’s wariness toward

²⁸ Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 22 (Nov. 1968): 12.

²⁹ Image by T. Kasymbekov, *Chalkan* no. 5 (May 1973): 6.



Figure 4.5. Central Asian *stiliagi* youth. Caption: “Oh lord, where have I ended up!” Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 22 (Nov. 1968): 12.



Figure 4.6. The post-war generation gap in Kyrgyzstan. Caption: – “You shouldn’t step on the bread, my child!” – “No one goes hungry anymore, grandfather.” Source: Image by T. Kasymbekov, *Chalkan* no. 5 (May 1973): 6.

the culture of consumerism and luxury that had emerged in the wake of the Second World War out of the increased availability of consumer goods and reopened contacts with the West. Throughout the Soviet Union, the rising tide of consumerism and Western-looking youth culture had kindled a feeling of profound ambivalence, with the figure of the *stiliaga* as the primary locus of concern. But in Central Asia, the cultural resonance of the generational gap and the accompanying ambivalence about post-war modernity was perhaps even more expansive than it was in Russia. Tropes of youth out of control and youth steeped in post-war luxury and selfish acquisitiveness intersected with changes in fashion and consumer behavior that became signifiers not only of shallow novelty, luxury, and waste, but also of modernity more broadly, of inauthenticity, and of a loss of social place and cultural rootedness within a specifically Central Asian community.

Sources of moral degeneration? The West, Russification, and modern urban life

Thus far I have described *stiliagi* and post-war Soviet youth culture in general as “Western-looking.” Criticisms of *stiliagi* in the Soviet press tended to identify one of the primary sources of this youthful affliction as foreign – the influence of the bourgeois West, its egotistic and materialistic values, its products, and its media.³⁰ As will be seen in the next chapter, many young Central Asians in this period did in fact identify with and exhibit an interest in the contemporary trends of the U.S. and Western Europe. But in the context of Central Asia, the most immediate nodes of transmission for these novel ideas, styles, and goods were in fact the Russian-influenced urban centers within the region, especially the republican capital cities, and this fact generated ambiguities and tensions in the Soviet Central Asian discourse on the problem of youth culture. If in Russian Soviet discourse, youth dissoluteness and immorality was associated with the capitalist West, then in Central Asia it might be

³⁰ Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235-236; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171-175.

just as easily linked with Russification, the perils of urban modernity, the weakening of traditional values, and young people's loss of their rootedness in indigenous cultural life. From a Central Asian cultural standpoint, the line between influences that were “Western” and those that were Russian or Soviet, between problems caused by the infiltration of bourgeois consumer culture and problems fostered by life in a cosmopolitan capital city, was anything but clear. The result was that the Central Asian press was able to draw on official Soviet rhetoric to develop a far-reaching and anxious discussion about the costs of modernity and cultural change, including the potential costs of innovations that were fostered by Soviet rule and endorsed by the Soviet state.

It was, to be sure, not uncommon for Central Asian satirical cartoons to draw a straight line connecting the adoption of *stiliagi* consumption habits to the imitation of foreign, specifically American or Western European, models. *Stiliagi* youth in Central Asian satires, like their Russian counterparts, listened to loud, raucous music, sometimes specifically identified as jazz or rock, performed the wild, “disorderly” dances favored among American youth, and fawned over Western fashions. The primary channels through which youth in the Soviet Union would fall under the influence of these pernicious Western fashions, according to press representations, were imported goods and imported Western media, especially music and films.³¹ In one Uzbek-language text satirizing the younger generation’s love of imported clothing, three *stiliagi* hear that a local shop is selling foreign-made pants. After marveling over the quality of the stitching and the fabric and its superiority to any domestically-made product, they find out that the label on the pants reading “S.Sh.A.” does not refer to the United States of America (*Soedinennyye Shtaty Ameriki*) but rather to the Samarkand Pants-making Artel (*Samarqand Shimchilik*

³¹ Puzzlingly, although in some cases these ideologically questionable goods and media were transmitted illicitly or via the black market, as in the case of the individual resellers (Rus. *fartsovshchiki*) of Western jeans, t-shirts, and cassette tapes, it was also not unusual for them to be made available through official channels. On Soviet theaters showing “bourgeois” films, see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 39-40. Chapter 5 will examine a few cases of individual experiences of obtaining Western clothing and music through grey and black market channels in Central Asia.

Arteli).³² The *stiliagi* are thus characterized as shallow, ignorant, and slavishly deferential to Western fashions, more concerned with the symbolism of the foreign label than with the quality of the product itself. Even more pointedly, an early Brezhnev-era cartoon portrayed a number of respectable Uzbek youth entering a movie theater showing what appears to be a glamorous and violent Hollywood film (identified in the caption as a “bourgeois” (*burjua*) film) only to emerge immediately afterward as disheveled, disorderly *stiliagi* types (Figure 4.7).³³ In addition to Soviet political signifiers – the youngest child in the image sheds his red Young Pioneer handkerchief after viewing the film – the violation of locally specific and gendered norms of Central Asian dress is again used to underscore the transformation: some of the young men enter the theater wearing the Uzbek *do'ppi* skull cap, which they afterward have abandoned, and a young woman's hemline moves from a modest calf length before the film to scandalously above the knee afterward.

Discussions about the corrupting influences of contemporary media, however, did not limit themselves to a Cold War-era preoccupation with the infiltration of bourgeois ideas and products from the West. Less pronounced but still active during this period were concerns about the potentially corrupting influences of cultural and technological novelties more generally, including the Soviet-endorsed phenomenon of television. While personal ownership of televisions in the Central Asian republics tended to lag slightly behind ownership figures in the USSR more generally, by 1969 televisions were present in a majority of urban homes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and a significant minority of rural ones.³⁴ As television became an increasingly regularized part of daily life in Central Asia, the local-language press began to concern itself with the question of how much time children should be allowed

³² Nusratillo Rahmatov, “Shim,” *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1973): 10.

³³ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1967): 11.

³⁴ 1969 surveys by the republican Central Statistical Administrations recorded ownership of televisions in about 62% of surveyed urban Uzbek and Kyrgyz households, 43% of rural (*kolkhoz*) Uzbek households, and 36% of rural Kyrgyz households. TsGA RUz, F. 1619, Op. 4, d. 4260; TsGA KR, F. 105, Op. 33, d. 3954.



Figure 4.7. Harmful foreign influences through cinema. Caption: “Entering a bourgeois film... and exiting.” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1967): 11.

to watch television in a single day, and satirical cartoons reflected anxieties about the potential social and cultural impacts of this technological novelty. As early as 1961, a *Mushtum* cartoon fretted that children who were supposed to be doing their homework might be sneaking a peek at the racy television programs watched by their parents (indicated by a man and woman kissing onscreen), while a 1978 image showed a television growing tentacles to reach out and ensnare the captivated members of a Kyrgyz family.³⁵

A rather amusing counterpoint to the moral panic about the negative influence of television-watching on children is a curious recurring motif in the Uzbek-language *Mushtum* of the 1970s: television as a potentially corrupting influence on elderly men as well, specifically through the medium of women's figure skating.³⁶ Soviet media and official rhetoric during this period tended to hail athletics as a progressive and cultured pursuit for young women, but in Central Asia many parents remained reluctant to allow their daughters to engage in sport, particularly when it involved public bodily display and dress that was regarded as too revealing, as in the case of gymnastics and figure skating.³⁷ As will be discussed in more detail below, the question of the increasing visibility of the female body in the post-war period, while not unique to the Central Asian context, was made more culturally laden and anxious by the history of violent conflict over veiling in the Stalin-era 1920s and 1930s. In these 1970s *Mushtum* satires, the connection between athletics and the visibility of the female body is made explicit, and television – even what is presumably regarded as ideologically sound, solidly Soviet programming – becomes a unique medium for purveying sexual titillation to Central Asian men. In some cases, the voyeuristic viewers of televised figure skating are men specifically identified as religious, and the satire's

³⁵ *Mushtum* no. 1 (Jan. 1961); image by M. Tomilov, *Chalkan* no. 8 (Aug. 1978): 11.

³⁶ I have found four cartoons on this theme, created by different artists between 1974 and 1978: image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15; image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7; image by L. Sharifzhonova, *Musthum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9; and image by T. Jamoidinnov, *Mushtum* no. 8 (Apr. 1978): 8.

³⁷ *Pervyi s"ezd zhenshchin Uzbekistana, 7 - 8 marta 1958 goda: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Tashkent, 1959), 78.

underlying anxiousness and ambivalence is leavened by a reassuringly boilerplate Soviet critique of religious hypocrisy. A 1975 variation on this theme, for instance, depicts a turbaned and bearded old man, evidently an Islamic religious practitioner, offering religious services to a woman with a veil pulled modestly across her face. He is interrupted by a child holding the sports page of the newspaper, who whispers, “Hurry up, grandfather, it’s three minutes until the figure skating starts” (Figure 4.8).³⁸

In other cases, though, the male viewer is not specifically vilified but is merely caught in a moment of relatively harmless embarrassment, as in a 1974 image in which an old man is scolded by his wife for becoming a bit too absorbed in a women’s figure skating broadcast: “Hey, you incorrigible old man, your tea has gotten cold!” (Figure 4.9).³⁹ Here the function of the satire, beyond its laconic humor, is less obvious. Both the elderly couple and their home in this cartoon are resolutely traditional; they sit on floor cushions around a low table drinking tea and eating bread, while the television stands as the sole marker of the intrusion of contemporary life into their domestic Central Asian idyll. But it would be difficult to read the television as an entirely harmful object in this scene. Like consumer culture more broadly, the television was treated in Soviet rhetoric as a potential source of the dangers of philistinism and excess, but simultaneously as one component of the abundance, comfort, and cultural development enabled by socialism in its humane post-Stalinist incarnation. From this latter perspective, the image of an elderly, otherwise traditionalist Central Asian couple drinking tea while watching television could practically serve as an advertisement for the success of the Soviet system. Indeed, an ethnographic study of Kyrgyz villages published in the same year as this cartoon boasted that the homes of the rural population were increasingly adorned by “televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, polished imported furniture, transistor radio receivers, and so on,” with these objects serving

³⁸ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7.

³⁹ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15.



Figure 4.8. “Hurry up, grandfather, it’s three minutes until the figure skating starts...” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Sep. 1975): 7.



Figure 4.9. “Hey, you incorrigible old man, your tea has gotten cold!” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 3 (Feb. 1974): 15.

as an index for the economic and cultural progress that had been achieved since the 1950s.⁴⁰ But the Soviet ambivalence about the potentially corrupting effects of luxury were picked up and amplified in the Central Asian context, becoming entangled with concerns about the newly prevalent exposure of female flesh and the slippage of standards of sexual morality.

Most widespread and conflicted of all of the recurrent tropes about the harmful influences of contemporary life on Central Asian youth, however, was the narrative of young men and women traveling from the village to the city, usually in order to attend university, and returning to their parents radically transformed, almost always for the worse. “Afandi’s son finished his studies,” begins one Uzbek-language joke printed in 1972, “and returned to the village as a flaming *stiliaga* [*qishloqqa qip-qizil stilyaga bo’lib qaytdi*].”⁴¹ The problematic nature of this narrative within Soviet discourse has already been noted in regard to the Kyrgyz satire of Baaly and her mother: forces ordinarily held up as progressive – the modern and “international” urban milieu and, especially, university education – are instead tarnished by association with immoral *stiliagi* culture. It was possible to alleviate some of this dissonance by identifying *stiliagi* not just as university students, but as especially bad students, as a 1978 Uzbek cartoon did with the caption: “These are the youths who failed in their studies in the city [*shaharda o’qishni ‘qoyillatib’*] and came back as *stiliagi*.”⁴² In Baaly’s case, too, it is her traditionally dressed, long-braided figure that is linked with images of notebooks and writing implements, indicating her status as a model Soviet student prior to leaving for Frunze; after her time in the capital, by contrast, these objects have been replaced by various items of cosmetics, with the implication that vanity and consumerism have supplanted her former academic diligence (see Figure 4.1). But the uncomfortable link between an urban Soviet education and moral degeneration is made more pointedly in a Kyrgyz

⁴⁰ S.M. Abramzon, G.N. Simakov, and L.A. Firshtein, “Nov’ kirgizskogo sela,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 5 (1974): 33.

⁴¹ *Mushtum* no. 8 (Apr. 1972): 13.

⁴² Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 2 (Jan. 1978): 3.

satirical poem from 1965, which ends by asking of the young woman who has returned from the city wearing pants and short hair, “Are these clothes the education that you have gained?”⁴³

The point of all of this does not seem to have been a comprehensive rejection of the Soviet value of education. For one thing, the Soviet state’s promotion of education, including education for young women, seems to have been a relatively high-priority and non-negotiable policy, constituting one of the hard limits placed on public discourse under Soviet rule. Even apart from this, though, the positive valuation of education, even women’s education, appears to have been internalized to some degree in local discourse, becoming a constituent part of the ideal of the restrained and responsible youth who is deferential to the authority of elders and respectful of local social and cultural norms. Occasionally, these model youths could take the place of elderly traditionalists in satirical cartoons as the moral foil for *stiliagi*. In one particularly richly layered example, two *stiliagi* mock a young Uzbek woman by saying, “Even though that girl studies in the fifth course [at university], she must be very backward [*juda qoloq ekan*] – just look at what she’s wearing!” (Figure 4.10).⁴⁴ In fact, the young woman is shown wearing the type of dress that had come to be defined as the quintessential Uzbek “national” dress for everyday wear by the post-war period – knee-length and modern in cut, but made from Uzbek *atlas* silk cloth.⁴⁵ Contrasted with her *stiliagi* ridiculers, she represents a model Soviet Central Asian youth, characterized by a fusion of socialist values (university education and the simple, functional elegance of her clothing), local ideals of femininity (long hair, graceful stride, and modestly downturned gaze), and ethnic distinctiveness and authenticity.

Yet this seemingly harmonious Soviet-Central Asian ideal is again complicated by the way that the Soviet epithet “backward” is deliberately discredited by being placed in the mouths of *stiliagi* youth.

⁴³ Image by Ch. Kyrkbaev, *Chalkan* no. 3 (Mar. 1965): 4.

⁴⁴ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 21 (Nov. 1967).

⁴⁵ The canonization of this style of dress as “national” is discussed in Chapter 1.



Figure 4.10. The *stiliagi* and the university student. Caption: “Even though that girl studies in the fifth course, she must be very backward – just look at what she’s wearing!” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 21 (Nov. 1967).

As we have already seen in the satire of Baaly and her mother, the lack of clarity on the question of whether the “foreign,” culturally inauthentic influences being decried were Western, Russian, or even Soviet in origin constituted a further ideologically awkward component of these narratives of wayward Central Asian youth. In a letter to the editor published in the Kyrgyz women’s journal *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* in 1983, the writer lays out a story eerily reminiscent of that of Baaly and her mother, but in this case presented as fact rather than as satire. Printed under the heading “An appeal to young women” (“Kyzdarga kairyluu”), the letter attacks the new clothing, hairstyles, and forms of behavior adopted by young Kyrgyz women under the influence of urban life.⁴⁶ During his youth a few decades earlier, the letter-writer recounts, a girl from his mountain village traveled to the city to study, and when she returned to visit he was surprised to see her “dressed like a city person [*shaardyktarcha kiyingen*].” The girl greeted her mother by saying, in a mix of Kyrgyz and Russian, “Are you well, *mama* [*salamatsyngby mama*]?” The mother stared at her for a moment, then responded reproachfully that she did not recognize this girl as her daughter: “My daughter had a long dress, and her hair was long as well... Aside from that, to say ‘*mama*’ [Rus.] instead of saying ‘mother’ [Kyrg. *ene*], showing my motherly love in carrying her with aching back for nine months and feeding her with my milk, would be beyond all limits.” As in the account of Baaly, the use of various Russianisms in Kyrgyz conversation joins the ranks of the cosmetic hand mirror and the foreign fashion label as a diagnostic marker of *stiliagi* degeneration and inauthenticity. The remarkably acerbic response of the mother in this case hints at some of the intense emotional content that surrounded the subject of Russian influence and ethnic authenticity within Soviet Central Asian discourse – the intimacy of the “national” as contrasted with the alienation from the “foreign” – but which seems out of place alongside the official rhetoric of harmonious mutual cultural influence and “internationalism.”

⁴⁶ A. Amatshanov, “Kyzdarga kairyluu,” *Kyrgyzstan Aialdary* no. 1 (Jan. 1983): 22.

In a few cases, Central Asian satires went as far as to present fashions that were not the flamboyant styles of the *stiliagi*, but rather the comparatively respectable European-style suits of the Russified urban milieu, as the visual indicators of moral degeneration under modern conditions. As before, this implication is mostly made by means of a visual contrast rather than explicit text, with the suit-wearing individual, shown behaving in an impolite or offensive way, juxtaposed with a traditionally-dressed elderly person. Often, the palatably “Soviet” content of these satires is a critique of bureaucratism and officials who ignore their responsibilities toward the ordinary people: the European-styled Uzbek or Kyrgyz bureaucrat ignores or condescends to the workers and collective farmers who have come to see him and who, significantly, are portrayed wearing elements of ethnically distinctive dress. In one Kyrgyz example, titled “The bureaucrat at home,” a man in a suit turns away his traditionally dressed father-in-law with the classic bureaucratic reply, “I’m busy, tell him to come back tomorrow.”⁴⁷ Evidently the Soviet rhetoric against bureaucratism, like the critiques of *stiliaga* youth culture, could take on additional implications as a critique of Russification when deployed in the Central Asian context. Perhaps the least subtle version of this pattern of linking Russification to moral degeneration, however, is found in an Uzbek satirical cartoon from 1977, which posits a rather respectable-looking Russified man as the intermediary stage in the “evolution of external appearance” from a traditional Uzbek village man to an outrageously dressed *stiliaga* (Figure 4.11).⁴⁸ His changes in clothing, hairstyle, and posture are accompanied by modifications to his name, from the Uzbek “Jo’ra,” to the Russified spelling of “Zhora,” and finally to the classically *stiliaga* “Zhorzhik,” formed by appending the Russian diminutive –ik to the American name “George.” Although it is nowhere explicitly stated, it is easy to read this “evolutionary” progression as implying that Russified Uzbeks were already one step along a path leading to corruption, inauthenticity, and cultural loss.

⁴⁷ Image by Ch. Kyrkbaev, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1976): 6.

⁴⁸ Image by L. Sharifjonova, *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9.



Figure 4.11. “The evolution of external appearance.” Source: Image by L. Sharifjonova, *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1977): 9.

In the context of the post-war period, discourse throughout the Soviet Union shifted in the direction of a rehabilitation of cultural conservatism and the decorous, staid morality associated with the rural population and the older generation, viewed as a counterweight to the uncertainty and degeneracy of modern urban life. Where this turn toward the past, toward nostalgia, traditionalism, and rural life, has typically been identified as a unique phenomenon of the Russian experience in the late Soviet Union – sometimes with the assumption that the growing interest in Russianness and Russian nationalism entailed a corresponding curtailment of non-Russian ethnic expression – the experience in Central Asia seems to have echoed the Russian one rather than existing in a zero-sum relationship with

it.⁴⁹ In the Central Asian case, moreover, this nostalgic turn took the form of a revitalized interest in both ethnic distinctiveness and traditional social and cultural values, facilitating not just an appeal to Central Asian rural life and its virtues, but also an examination of the moral hazards of modern Soviet society. Russified urban areas were no longer only centers of modernity and enlightenment, but as the main hotbeds of dissolute youth culture, could also become sites of moral degeneration; traditionalist rural areas, while by no means free from insinuations of backwardness, could now also be proffered as bastions of exactly those “Soviet” virtues that were increasingly under threat – industriousness, respectability, self-control, modesty.

Gender-bending, sexuality, and the construction of Soviet Central Asian gender norms

It is already clear from the above examples that the issues of gender, gendered roles within the family, gendered standards of dress, and gendered concerns about sexual propriety and modesty served as recurring fascinations for the post-war Central Asian satirical press. In particular, satirical stories and cartoons employed young people’s violations of gender-specific norms of dress – whether male or female – as both a metaphor for and a direct manifestation of the ways in which Central Asian social relationships had been thrown into flux in modern, urban, consumerist conditions. On one level, the special concern with clothing, and especially with women’s clothing, might be imagined as a distant echo of the events surrounding the 1927 campaign against veiling in Central Asia, when changes in female dress became intensely politicized and associated, among both advocates and opponents of unveiling, with cultural revolution and social upheaval.⁵⁰ In the wake of the veil’s decline over the post-war

⁴⁹ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ On the Soviet unveiling campaign and resistance to it, see Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; and Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*. Massell, in particular, argues that the Bolshevik decision to target gender and the veil was calculated to disrupt Central Asian society at a fundamental level and thus open it up for revolutionary transformation.

decades, the subject of women's dress was no longer as violently polarized as before, but it continued to be a focus of social anxieties, invested with particular moral significance. Like opponents of unveiling had in the 1920s, the Central Asian press underscored the rhetorical link between the regulation of women's dress and the maintenance of proper gender distinctions, sexual morality, and social order. It also linked the most threatening changes in women's dress to the complex of modern, urban, foreign, and even Russian or Soviet influences decried in satires on *stiliagi* more generally.

While the particular history of the Soviet unveiling campaign served as the constant backdrop of these discussions, though, the preoccupation with changing women's styles in conjunction with new commodities and consumption practices was not unique to Central Asia. In fact, many researchers have found it to be a recurring feature of debates about modernity and ethnic identity in many parts of the world during the 20th century. Caricatured representations of the fashion-obsessed, voraciously consumerist, and sexualized "Modern Girl" were deployed in a wide variety of contexts to critique the transgression of boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity, and nation brought about by the global movement of commodities and the expansion of consumer culture.⁵¹ Central Asian satirical discourses shared with these other representations of the "Modern Girl" the icons of the mirror, cosmetics, and fashion magazine, which together suggested that this type of young woman had forsaken traditional feminine roles and virtues in favor of frivolity, self-centeredness, and consumerism. In caricatures of such young women in early 20th century China, like in post-war Central Asia, the vanity or hand-held mirror became an especially ubiquitous and potent symbol: in addition to soliciting the male gaze, these caricatures suggested, the Modern Girl "also gazes at herself: she is narcissistic and consciously makes herself sexually attractive."⁵² Such images thus packaged together consumerism, decadent materialism and self-centeredness, and hyper-sexualization or sexual aggressiveness in a way that made the Modern

⁵¹ Alys Weinbaum et al., eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵² Madeleine Y. Dong, "Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?", in *Modern Girl Around the World*, 208.

Girl a convenient target for attack from socialists, advocates of national identity, and defenders of traditionalist morality alike. Additionally, although the topic of “race” as such was largely absent from Soviet discourse, the Central Asian-language press did express concerns about the erosion of local standards of feminine beauty in favor of a sort of de-ethnicized “fashionable” standard, which in some ways resembled anxieties about racial boundary-crossing and racial shame that new commodities (especially cosmetics) elicited within South Africa and the United States in the first half of the 20th century.⁵³ Satirical images and texts fretted that young Central Asian women were at risk of falling under the influence of alien standards of beauty and, as a result, neglecting or deliberately destroying the features that were valued within the local feminine ideal. As we have seen in the story of Baaly, this could include dyeing the hair blonde, shearing off the long thick braids in favor of a more “modern” short hairstyle, and heavily using cosmetics. A 1958 cartoon from *Mushtum* made this transition from a local feminine ideal to a foreign one explicit, juxtaposing a long-haired, clean-faced Uzbek woman with the caption, “She used to be as beautiful as the moon,” with her appearance after excessive exposure to foreign fashion magazines (Figure 4.12).⁵⁴ The title attached to the image – “The result of too much imitation!” – and the blonde-haired women on the covers of many of the corrupting magazines signaled that the problem was one not only of female immodesty, but also of artificiality, of adopting alien and superficial standards of feminine beauty, and of straying from ethnic authenticity.

Perhaps the most unmistakable preoccupation of the post-war satirical press, however, was the bodily exposure of women, and above all of female *stiliagi*. It is certainly revealing that while the figure of the *stiliaga* tended to be gendered male in the Russian context,⁵⁵ in Central Asian-language satires it

⁵³ Lynn M. Thomas, “The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa,” in *Modern Girl Around the World*, 108.

⁵⁴ Image by Ra’no Ismatova, “Ortiqcha taqlidchilik oqibati!”, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Dec. 1958): 9.

⁵⁵ This claim is made both in Juliane Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 218; and in Brandon Gray Miller, “Between Creation and Crisis: Soviet Masculinities, Consumption, and Bodies after Stalin,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Michigan State University, 2013), 135.



Figure 4.12. “The result of too much imitation!” Caption: “She used to be as beautiful as the moon...”
 Source: Image by Ra’no Ismatova, *Mushtum* no. 18 (Dec 1958): 9.

was overwhelmingly represented as female. Exposure of female flesh, for reasons that are not too difficult to imagine, routinely stood in for all of the excess, immorality, and social disruption that were imagined as the consequences of unrestrained consumerism. But it is also striking that the satirical press seems almost as concerned with visualizing and depicting “immodest” *stiliagi* women as with criticizing them. In their rawest form, representations of exposed female bodies in the local-language press were accompanied by remarkably little in the way of political commentary or satirical interpretation; in any number of cartoons in Uzbek and Kyrgyz journals of the post-war decades, the “joke,” to the extent that there was one, rested on a man gawking at a woman in a revealing dress. Even in the absence of overtly moralizing commentary, though, many of these images implicitly connected changing women’s fashions to male temptation and to the danger of sexual impropriety, with a man’s gaze being led away from his wife and toward an unknown young woman (Figure 4.13). It could be said that the dangers of seduction were both represented and replayed in the pages of these journals. There are a small number of cases where cartoonists seem to have made an effort to depict



Figure 4.13. The moral hazards of new consumption habits. No caption. Source: Image by M. Tomilov, *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1966): 10.

exposed (often explicitly *stiliagi*) women as either comical or self-evidently repugnant, exaggerating their garishness or slovenliness. Just as often, however, what was exaggerated was instead their sexual desirability. In depictions of scantily dressed women, the curvature of breasts, thighs and calves was outlined in meticulous detail, the narrowness of waists and ankles heightened beyond realistic bounds. Very frequently, the ostensible object of moral condemnation was thus portrayed – rather overtly, it could be said – as an object of desire as well. There is, of course, nothing uniquely Central Asian about this duality. But within the cultural context of Soviet Central Asia, the visibility of the female body in public spaces was a relatively recent phenomenon, and often implicitly understood as a direct byproduct of Soviet or Russian influence.⁵⁶ The ambivalence inherent in these images – the blending of enticement

⁵⁶ David Abramson observes this phenomenon near the end of the Soviet period, in the late 1980s and 1990s, manifested in a view of “Russian and European women as sexually promiscuous and therefore as available for liaisons” as well as street harassment of Uzbek women dressed in miniskirts accompanied by shouts of “Dress like

and moral danger – was thus not merely ambivalence toward female sexuality, but also toward the post-war cultural milieu that intermingled women's emancipation and fashionable consumption to make the public display of sexualized femininity possible.

Alongside vicarious titillation, then, images that represented exposed female bodies under the gazes of strangers and in public spaces – streets, squares, parks, public transit – both worked to foster a sense that women's dress was subject to continuous communal scrutiny and construed this scrutinizing community as a distinctly local, Central Asian one. One studiously ambiguous 1969 cartoon depicted a voluptuous young woman squirming uncomfortably under the stare of a young man sitting across from her on a Tashkent tram. “Why are you staring like that, aren't you ashamed?” she asks, trying to pull her short dress down over her legs. “You dressed that way so that men would look at you, sweetheart,” he replies (Figure 4.14).⁵⁷ If the young man himself hardly makes for a commendable figure – in the visual language of the late Soviet press, he possesses the slouching posture and coiffed hair that typically signified male *stiliagi* – he both serves as a surrogate for the disapproving/desiring gaze of the presumed reader and has the privilege of delivering the final word and punchline. He is, perhaps, also implicated in the degeneration in sexual morality on display, but its primary locus remains the woman's exposed body, and its root cause lies with the contravention of gendered norms enabled within contemporary consumer culture. At the edge of the frame, an elderly, bearded Uzbek man wearing a traditional-style *do'ppi* sits as the silent witness of this exchange. A decade earlier, a similar cartoon had appointed no less venerable a figure than the 15th-century Central Asian poet Alisher Navoiy as the witness and voice of communal reprobation. In this case, the image shows a young Uzbek woman in a short dress sitting on a bench in a public square and, in classic “Modern Girl” fashion, applying makeup while gazing into a mirror. The statue of Alisher Navoiy presiding over the square throws his arm in

an Uzbek girl!” David Abramson, “Engendering Citizenship in post-Communist Uzbekistan,” *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 71.

⁵⁷ Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Aug. 1969): 4.



Figure 4.14. Satire of women’s dress under public scrutiny. Caption: – “Why are you staring like that, aren’t you ashamed?” – “You dressed that way so that men would look at you, sweetheart.” Source: Image by N. Ibrohimov, *Mushtum* no. 17 (Aug. 1969): 4.

front of his eyes and delivers a famous line from his poem “Farhod va Shirin”: “Let my eyes fall out, rather than see you this way!” (Figure 4.15).⁵⁸

Excessive makeup, low-cut dresses, short skirts, and hyper-sexualization were not the only ways that young *stiliagi* women could violate Central Asian gendered norms of dress, however. Such women were, somewhat counterintuitively, often accused of androgyny as well. In fact, *stiliagi* of both genders were subject to critique on the grounds that they blurred or inverted conventional gender norms.

⁵⁸ L. Oxunjonov, image by N. Leushin, “Navoiy haykali tagida,” *Mushtum* no. 14 (Jul. 1959).



Figure 4.15. “Under the Navoiy monument.” Caption: Navoiy – “Let my eyes fall out, rather than see you this way!” Source: L. Oxunjonov, image by N. Leushin, *Mushtum* no. 14 (Jul. 1959).

Women cropped their hair short and wore slacks; men grew their hair long and wore the bright colors and flamboyant patterns that were locally associated with feminine modes of dress; and both adhered to similar Western fashion trends and engaged in similar public behaviors, like smoking cigarettes.⁵⁹ Cartoons that represented male and female *stiliagi* as virtually indistinguishable from one another due to their preferred hairstyles and fashions became a recurring genre in the Central Asian satirical press in the post-war decades. The cover image of a 1974 issue of Uzbekistan's *Mushtum*, for example, showed one young person – long-haired, in platform shoes and flared trousers, smoking, accessorized with an imported handbag – handing a flower to another figure of nearly identical appearance. The image was published for the International Women's Day holiday, when men throughout the Soviet Union conventionally offered flowers and well-wishes to women; but in this case, the caption noted, the gender roles were ambiguous: Who was offering the flower to whom (Figure 4.16)?⁶⁰ The danger of confusion and social disruption arising from such androgyny was typically played up in these satires, which again made liberal use of public spaces and strangers' gazes, often adopting the perspective of an outside observer caught in a moment of ambiguity or, worse, mistaking one gender for the other. "Who is the young woman [*kelin*], and who is the young man?" asked a 1961 Kyrgyz-language poem titled "A difficult and mysterious riddle," with an image depicting two short-haired young people wearing similar garishly colored t-shirts.⁶¹ A 1971 variant in *Mushtum* showed two elderly women speculating as to which was the male member of a young couple, indistinguishable when seen from behind due to their similarly long hair and identical jackets and slacks.⁶² Although it was typically handled only obliquely, the blurring of the boundary between male and female was at times linked to the danger of sexual

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the role of color in gendered norms of dress, see Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1974).

⁶¹ B. Momunbekov, "Tataal syrduu tabyshmak," *Chalkan* no. 12 (Dec. 1961): 10.

⁶² Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 2 (Jan. 1971): 9.



Figure 4.16. Blurring of gender boundaries in *stiliagi* youth culture. Caption: “A picture-riddle. Who is congratulating whom?” Source: Image by A. Xoliqov, *Mushtum* no. 5 (Mar. 1974).

confusion as well, as in a 1980 sketch in *Chalkan* that showed a man hopefully offering flowers to a long-haired figure on a park bench, only to be knocked flat in cartoonish shock when that figure turned out to be a man sporting a mustache (Figure 4.17).⁶³ The consistent linkage that these satires established between youth trends and the disruption of conventional gender norms implicated consumer culture in an unmooring of post-war Central Asian society from its foundations, even while suggesting the need to reaffirm a gendered social order under modern, Soviet conditions.

To be sure, many of these same anxieties about the shifting of gender roles and gendered self-presentations as a result of contact with Western goods and fashions can be found in Soviet Russia's satirical press during this period.⁶⁴ Yet in the Central Asian case, these anxious discourses about gender frequently folded in a set of specifically local idioms and associations that both grounded the problem in local social life and freighted it with additional cultural baggage. Take, for instance, an Uzbek-language joke printed in 1972:

When Afandi woke up in the morning, his pants were not where he had left them. Surprised, he got out of bed and asked his wife where they were. She answered, laughing, "Husband, your daughter left this morning wearing your pants." Afandi shook his head and said to his wife: "And I always thought it was in vain that they had scolded you, saying, 'If only you had given birth to a son...'"⁶⁵

To begin with, aside from the folksy "Central Asianness" conferred on the joke through the inclusion of Afandi as the protagonist, the notion that wearing slacks still constituted a mildly gender-bending act for a woman in the 1970s was somewhat specific to Central Asia. Note, for instance, the admonition in a 1974 Soviet Uzbek advice article, which admitted that although trousers (Uzb. *shim*) were increasingly regarded as fashionable among young women, "this article of clothing is not very suitable for wear on

⁶³ Image by A. Abdurakhmanov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1980): 7.

⁶⁴ Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 225-226; Brandon Gray Miller, "Between Creation and Crisis," 176.

⁶⁵ *Mushtum* no. 9 (May 1972): 13.



Figure 4.17. Androgyny and sexual confusion. Caption: “No explanation necessary.” Source: Image by A. Abdurakhmanov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1980): 7.

the street in our conditions,” and ought to be worn only within the home.⁶⁶ Satirical cartoons printed in Kyrgyzstan around this time reiterated the notion that this act entailed a transgression of gender and familial roles, showing young women wearing trousers that they had, as in the Afandi joke, specifically borrowed from their fathers. In one cartoon, the implications of cross-dressing and gender reversal were played up even further, with the young woman dressed in her father’s full professional attire –

⁶⁶ “Uy libosi,” *Saadat* no. 7 (Jul. 1974).

suit, tie, and fur cap – and him asking in return, “Am I supposed to wear your skirt to work?!” (Figure 4.18).⁶⁷

Yet in the Afandi joke cited above, the punchline not only suggests that the act of wearing trousers masculinizes a young woman, but draws in a locally specific touchstone for gender differences (and inequities) in the prescribed reproach to a young mother who bore a daughter: “If only you had given birth to a son [Uzb. *sen o’g’il tug’maysan*].” If the customary expression of a preference for sons over daughters was hardly unique to Central Asian cultures, in this case it was undeniably local in provenance, written into this 1972 Soviet journal precisely because it would have been recognizable from the social life and shared cultural vocabulary of Uzbek readers. In a sense, this punchline serves to re-stabilize the division between male and female by contextualizing the young woman’s act within a particularly Uzbek version of the gender binary. Part of the effect – and perhaps, also the intention – of discourses about youth, gender, and consumption in the local-language press was thus to offer commentary on these contemporary issues in a distinctly Central Asian voice. Not just language, but also images, tropes, and associations were localized in these post-war satirical discourses, and the result was to create layers of meaning on top of, and to a degree interwoven with, the meanings conveyed in Russian-language Soviet discourse.

To give an additional example, another fragment of Central Asian culture that was periodically trotted out to comment on the violation of gendered norms among young *stiliagi* was a proverb (evidently existing in both Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages) that jocularly derided women as “long in hair, short on wits” (Uzb. *sochi uzun, aqli qisqa*; Kyrg. *chachy uzun, aklyly kyska*). Once again, the recognizability of this adage to a local audience was crucial, and as in the case of the phrase “if only you had given birth to a son,” its deployment in an unexpected context was probably intended for humorous effect. But beyond this, and perhaps less intentionally, it contextualized Soviet-era concerns about

⁶⁷ Image by O. Kasmaliev, *Chalkan* no. 12 (Dec. 1983): 7; Image by Zh. Baibachaev, *Chalkan* no. 3 (Mar. 1976): 10.



Figure 4.18. “Am I supposed to wear your skirt to work?!” Source: Image by O. Kasmaliev, *Chalkan* no. 12(Dec. 1983): 7.

gender and the growing mutability of gender roles within a locally specific set of beliefs, attitudes, and conceptions of maleness and femaleness. The new meanings that were generated through this juxtaposition were multi-layered and at times contradictory. On the one hand, the phrase “long in hair, short on wits” could be applied to a long-haired man in a way that disavowed its implicit denigration of women even while making use of that denigration to imply that *stiliagi* men were both feminized and unintelligent: “His father used to say that women are long in hair and short on wits,” two Uzbek women watching a long-haired man walk by ironically comment (Figure 4.19).⁶⁸ On the other hand, the phrase

⁶⁸ Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 13 (Jul. 1972): back cover.

could be placed in the mouth of a young woman as a justification for her decision to cut her hair short: “Let’s see what the people who say ‘long in hair, short on wits’ will say now!” (Figure 4.20).⁶⁹ This latter use would almost seem to recast a woman’s decision to shear her hair off as an admirable, or at least sympathetic, act of empowerment and self-redefinition – except that the young woman in the image is portrayed with the telltale cosmetics and hand mirror that were utilized in the Central Asian press to signify the narcissistic, self-absorbed, socially irresponsible female consumer. Disentangling the competing meanings at play here is difficult, other than to say, in the most general sense, that both of the above examples comment on the tension between contemporary youth styles and conventional Central Asian ideas about gender. But in some ways, it is precisely the density, complexity, and ambiguity of these examples that is the point. They demonstrate that the interplay of all-union and local discourses about consumption and modernity spawned new cultural content that was both deeply embedded in local life and only weakly controlled by the strictures of Soviet political correctness. The muddled, ideologically un-worked out way that Central Asian tropes and images were deployed in the satirical press suggests neither a cynical state effort to find a “national” vessel for “socialist content” nor a pre-meditated Central Asian effort to smuggle oppositional messages into print. It suggests, instead, a process of groping toward a normative response to increasingly unmoored social and gender relations – a process in which elements of both Soviet rhetoric and purely local discourses occupied a foundational place as cultural “givens.”

As in the case of critiques of *stiliagi* more generally, explorations of how consumer culture threatened existing regimes of gender and sexual regulation created a forum in the local press for the elaboration of a locally specific set of concerns and values. At times, the ways that all-Soviet and locally specific images and tropes overlapped and interfered with one another generated genuinely unexpected

⁶⁹ Image by Iusupov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun.1960): 6. For a similar example, see “Ailasyn tapty,” *Chalkan* no. 4 (Apr. 1966): 8.



Figure 4.19. “His father used to say that women are long in hair and short on wits...” Source: Image by T. Muhamedov, *Mushtum* no. 13 (Jul. 1972).



Figure 4.20. “Let’s see what people who say ‘long in hair, short on wits’ will say now!” Source: Image by Yusupov, *Chalkan* no. 6 (Jun. 1960): 6.

results, including the ability to articulate critiques of Soviet modernity and Russian cultural influence beyond the normal bounds of Soviet permissibility. Yet perhaps the most powerful outcomes of this interplay of central and local discourses lay at the points where they reinforced one another – in their attacks on feminized men, masculinized women, sexual immodesty, and youth out of control. Although shot through with ambivalences and anxieties, in many respects the net effect of these discourses was to reconstruct and reinforce a local set of gendered norms of dress and behavior that were grounded in the points of overlap between Soviet and Central Asian moralities.

Conclusion

The specter of dissolute youth culture and fears of a rising tide of consumer acquisitiveness and “bourgeois mentalities” in the post-war period created a situation in which Central Asian tradition and ethno-cultural specificity could be reframed in the public discourse of the region as a potentially healthy influence, bolstering Soviet values in their struggle against excessive, rootless consumerism. In contrast to the antagonistic state rhetoric about Central Asian family structures and values that had prevailed during the 1920s and 1930s, the official Soviet Central Asian press under Khrushchev and Brezhnev frequently appealed to traditionalism, the authority of elders over youth (and especially over young women), and the defense of national distinctiveness as checks on the perceived dangers of out-of-control consumerism. Discussions about consumption within the Soviet Central Asian public sphere thus facilitated a rapprochement, and to some degree cross-pollination, between central and local, state and non-state values and discourses. The result was change on both fronts, as Soviet discourse in the region became suffused with local ideas about modesty, family hierarchy, and cultural authenticity, and traditional Central Asian ideals and practices were being reframed in terms of the Soviet values of hard work, social responsibility, education, and consumerist restraint.

Nevertheless, tensions persisted within this Soviet-Central Asian consensus, and an examination of Central Asian satirical discourses reveals something of the extremely fraught and loaded social context in which consumption decisions would necessarily be made. Regardless of an individual consumer's intentions, their consumption choices would be read and critiqued in terms of questions of authenticity and culturedness, morality, soundness as a Soviet person or a Central Asian woman. As we will see in the next chapter, Central Asian consumers, and women in particular, were obliged to negotiate an extremely narrow and situationally shifting middle ground between being labeled as uncultured or backward and being seen as immodest or deracinated. The overlap and interplay of Soviet and Central Asian value systems could create myriad opportunities for self-expression and selective affiliation for Central Asian consumers; but in a context in which consumer choice was laden with multi-layered ideological, aesthetic, and moral implications, individuals were obliged to make decisions on the backdrop of a volatile social and cultural terrain in which the field of entirely safe and neutral options was drastically constricted.