

Post-Soviet Art and Culture in Central Asia

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Introduction

The political consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union have been subject of interest and scrutiny by the outside world since it happened in 1991. A very important area that was deeply affected by the collapse of the communist regime - and yet has not received much attention - is artistic and cultural activities.

A unique outlook provided the basis for the development of a comprehensive system of artistic and cultural activities throughout the Soviet Union. An important feature of the system was its uniformity, with similar institutions in each republic and central control from Moscow. This was because of the importance placed on art and culture in Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which sought to discard the “undesirable” elements conducive to bourgeois proclivities and behavior. The doctrine called for an overwhelming role by the state in guiding cultural activities; hence, the necessity to have a uniform and comprehensive cultural policy. During seventy years of communist rule, an elaborate system was created with its own institutions to centrally manage, support, and direct art and culture in the Soviet empire.

With varying degrees, art and culture have become freed from the obligation to serve the state ideology. Moscow’s central control and support has also vanished, but the system with its institutions continues to operate in the newly independent states. So do the norms, values, definition and purpose of art, as defined under the Soviet system; they will live on until they are gradually replaced. The absence of Moscow’s central control and support, along with economic difficulties has disrupted artistic and cultural activities in many of the newly independent states. This has been especially true in the newly independent states of Central Asia. As these republics are trying to come to terms with their new status as independent nation-states, they have to address the question of art and culture and its place in their new societies.

This paper takes a look at the institutions that support artistic and cultural activities, training, promotion, budgeting, and policy making in the five republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. It is a report on the status of art and

culture in post-Soviet Central Asia. This study started in 1992 and is based on over one hundred interviews with officials, musicians, dancers, writers, and singers, as well as visits to centers of art and culture in the republics of Central Asia (excluding Uzbekistan). As similar institutions exist in each republic, of each category only one is discussed. Thus, a conservatory of music in Kazakhstan, a typical house of culture in Kyrgyzstan, and the writers association in Turkmenistan etc. are dealt with in some detail. In the end an attempt will be made to foresee where art and culture are heading in these countries.

Under the Soviets, state support was universal, covering both indigenous and Western art and culture. Western classical music, opera, ballet, theater, and cinema were introduced to the region in the 1930s. Students were sent to conservatories in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. Others were trained under Russian masters in their own republics. Indigenous art and culture, too, received attention; systematic study of folklore was undertaken and traditional songs and dances were recorded and performed professionally. Russian choreography was incorporated into traditional dances, and elements of Western music, such as orchestration and harmonization, were introduced into the traditional music.

There was one exception: religious art was forcefully opposed. Thus, calligraphy, Islamic architecture, and the maintenance of historical monuments of religious significance suffered tremendously. Furthermore, the changing of the alphabet to Cyrillic in the 1930s dealt a severe blow to the languages and literatures of the Central Asian peoples, bringing about the eventual weakening of those languages.

Artists as the Elite in Society

The Soviets defined specific criteria for artistic and cultural activities. Within this framework, professional artists enjoyed a privileged life. The State - the sole patron of art - commissioned their work and rewarded them liberally with bonuses, vacations in seaside resorts and trips throughout the Soviet Union and abroad. A very important feature of the system was the job security granted to artists, freeing them from anxieties concerning unemployment and the retirement years.

Accomplished artists were granted honorary titles. In addition to prestige, the titles brought them extra pay and privileges. The honorary titles were as follows:

Outstanding Artist of the Republic.

People's Artist of the Republic.

People's Artist of the Soviet Union.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union the third category lost its *raison d'être*, but the other titles are still granted to meritorious artists. The procedure is as follows: Each year, artistic groups (orchestras, theaters, etc.) nominate one or more of their members. Upon approval of the Artists' Association, the nominations go to the ministry of culture. The ministry in turn introduces the nominee(s) to the office of the president that confers the honors. There is a similar system for honoring accomplished writers and poets.

The Elder Brother Mentality

The state acted as the "elder brother" and provided for the community. With the collapse of the Soviet Union that support has disappeared. Concert tours and exchanges of singers, dancers, and writers, traditionally organized through financial support from Moscow, are a thing of the past. The political leadership in the newly independent states of Central Asia is left with the responsibility of managing artistic and cultural affairs in their countries. The infrastructure is there, so are the managerial skills needed for the task, but the absence of central coordination and diminishing financial support has had a negative effect on the artistic community. Of the more than one hundred individuals interviewed in the course of this study, everyone believed in the necessity of the state's dominant role as the "elder brother." While the community has welcomed the changes brought about by the breakup of the Soviet Union, it has been deeply disappointed with the disappearance of the security and support which used to be offered by Moscow. A sense of nostalgia for the "good old days" is all too obvious.

The Transition to A Market Economy

The deterioration of artistic and cultural life is not caused by the absence of Moscow's role alone. The transition to a capitalist economy and free market system has exacerbated the situation. In most of the newly independent states the economy is in shambles. Industrial and

agricultural production have dropped, inflation is rapidly eating away the purchasing power of the public, and unemployment is rising at an alarming pace. This has resulted in the depletion of the resources that the new governments have at their disposal. Governmental commitment to supporting art and culture has not changed, but it can hardly match what Moscow had to offer in terms of financial resources.

The transition to the market system has seriously affected art and culture in another way as well. The “elder brother” mentality and the total lack of experience in operating within the market system on the part of the government officials, artists, and the public as a whole, have left the artists and the writers in a state of confusion. An example will illustrate the problem. Under the Soviet system the state commissioned writers to produce books according to the guidelines provided. A writer would thus be asked to write a novel in a kolkhoz setting, glorifying the working spirit of the local community. He would be allowed to stay in a “production house” (a seaside villa on the Caspian, for instance) while working on the book. Like others, he was an employee of the state and would receive a guaranteed monthly salary. In addition, he would receive a bonus for writing a good novel. He would use his time and talent to complete the project. Once he submitted the manuscript, he needed not worry about printing, publishing, and distributing the book. Upon approval of his work by the Writers’ Union (a powerful arm of the state), the Union handled the rest of the work. Throughout, market considerations were irrelevant. Books would be sent to officials and government agencies in large numbers and go on sale to the public at heavily subsidized prices.

Today, in most cases the state no longer commissions work. Writers have to decide the topic and the content of their books. Since publication and distribution of books are no longer automatic, they have to know what the public wants and is willing to pay for. In the absence of a market mechanism this is not possible. The publisher is equally in the dark about the market and does not know whether the book would sell. The high cost of paper, imported with hard currency, and other printing expenses is an added obstacle. Yet another problem is the dwindling purchasing power of the public. The economic crisis that has ensued since the breakup of the Soviet Union has forced the people to seek second jobs in order to make ends meet. They are left with an income that is spent on essential commodities alone, and with little leisure time to indulge in reading.

The Talent Drain

An unfortunate outcome of the political upheavals and the economic crisis in Central Asia has been a sudden wave of emigration of artists from the region to Russia, Europe, and Israel, especially among Russians, Germans, and Jewish citizens of the republics. Western genres of art have suffered most. Thus, Central Asia has lost its best artistic talents to the outside world at a time when they are needed most. Dwindling income, concerns about job security, fear of discrimination, and uncertainty about the future have been mainly responsible for the emigration. The lure of a better life in the West as perceived in Western films has further expedited the flow of emigration. In Tajikistan, the talent drain has reached tragic proportions. The civil war has almost totally eliminated certain genres of artistic expression while seriously undermining others.

The Major Institutions of Art and Culture

Artistic and cultural activities take place in various institutions, the most important of which are the filarmoni, the state radio and television, the houses of culture, the artists' and writers' associations, academies of science, public libraries, and museums. The ministry of culture and the executive committees in each town and village are responsible for the administration of such activities at the macro and micro levels, respectively.

Ministry of Culture

The ministry of culture is the most important institution involved in artistic and cultural activities. It is responsible for planning, budgeting, administration, and coordination of all such activities. Because of the absence of the private sector, the ministry is the main employer of artists. Since independence, certain activities in the private sector have begun in some republics. This is by no means the norm, however, and such activities will continue to be in state hands for a long time to come. There are amateur musicians, dancers, and artists in villages and small towns, but even their activities are facilitated and supported by the state. Before independence, ministries in each republic acted as branches of the ministry of culture of the

Soviet Union. Most planning, budgeting and coordination was done in Moscow, but since then, these responsibilities have been taken over by the ministry of culture in each republic. Independence has almost eliminated the coordination between the republics. The ministry has various directorate generals and departments charged with overseeing and administration of a wide range of activities. Typically the ministry of culture has departments in charge of people's productions (handicrafts, and traditional arts produced in small towns and villages), museums and public libraries, amusement parks, orchestras, and dance groups.

State Filarmoni

The state filarmoni is a unique institution found in all the independent republics. It houses various orchestras, music ensembles, and dance groups - both traditional and Western. It is the main center for performing art. Typically, the filarmoni is situated in a majestic building in the capital, and has facilities for rehearsal and performance of art.

State Radio and Television

The state radio and television occupied a critical position in the Soviet Union. It was an invaluable tool at the hands of the state in shaping public opinion and influencing people's culture. It remains an important institution in the newly independent states. In most republics the state radio and television has its own orchestras and dance groups, which occasionally perform live concerts. Because of the importance attached to this institution, the state radio and television has always been independent of the ministry of culture, being directly under the supreme council and receiving its budget from the military and communications establishments. The president of the state radio and television has had the status of a minister. With the rapid improvement in communications technology and the expansion of the global satellite network, the electronic media are assuming an even greater role in influencing culture.

Since independence, private stations have been granted licenses to operate in the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. As private enterprises these stations carry commercial advertisements promoting mainly consumer goods. A good portion of their programming is filled with commercially produced Western films; quality programs reflecting

Western high culture are rarely aired. As such, the private television stations have virtually become important tools in promoting consumerism and a restricted aspect of Western culture.

Academies of Science and State Universities

Academies carry out research in various fields whereas state universities are primarily responsible for education.

Artists' and Writers' Association

These associations were in effect part of the government, playing a critical role in regulating the activities and lives of the artistic and literary community. The associations' dual role as both advocate of the literary and the artistic community and as the state's censoring agency has been particularly interesting. In the post-Soviet era each independent republic's association remains an important institution.

Houses of Culture

Houses of Culture were the cornerstone of Soviet cultural policy. They were founded in every town and village as centers for social gathering and meeting, where state-sponsored activities could take place. Houses of culture vary in size and in terms of the facilities they offer. A house of culture has one or more auditoriums for amateur performers, meeting room(s), a vocational training center, and a library. In the villages, amateur actors and musicians can borrow costumes and musical instruments during their performance at the house.

The Ministry of Culture in Tajikistan

As in other Central Asian republics, the ministry of culture is in charge of supervision and management of most cultural activities. Professional theaters, ballets, operas, orchestras, libraries, museums, amusement parks, archeological institutions, as well as provincial amateur cultural centers are all under the authority of the ministry. The ministry has separate departments

that include the Bureau for Preservation of Historic and Cultural Monuments, and “the Center for People’s Productions” (handicrafts, artworks, music, etc.). The ministry of culture also owns manufacturing enterprises and workshops, one of which produces musical instruments.

The Center for People’s Productions

This was part of an organization based in Moscow with nine branches throughout the Soviet Union. In Tajikistan, it was turned into the Center for People’s Productions. The center, which primarily has a consultative and supportive role, only deals with amateur activities. It has three departments.

The Department of Cultural and Recreational Activities.

The Department of People’s Handicrafts and Artistic Activities.

The Publication Department.

The Department of Cultural and Recreational Activities is in charge of amusement parks. This includes managing recreational facilities and holding festivals in the parks. These parks are typically managed by the executive committees of the municipalities. The Department of Handicrafts and Artistic Activities has four branches: music, dance, theatrical activities (circus, traditional theaters, and narration of folk stories), and graphic arts (painting, photography, design, etc.).

The center is involved in a wide range of activities. It sends experts to provinces and regions in this mountainous country to tape local tunes and dances. These tapes are studied and analyzed at the center. Based on these, it publishes educational literature on local customs, music, and dances, and makes it available to other interested amateur musicians, dancers, and artists. These publications have almost completely stopped because of lack of money. The center has a working relationship with the Academy and the School of Fine Arts in Dushanbe. They hold joint seminars for directors of the houses of culture. The autonomous region of Badakhshan has an independent center. The center oversees, and is in contact with, houses of culture in all fifteen regions and provinces in the country, but it does not have branches in them.

The Cultural Foundation of Tajikistan

The Cultural foundation of Tajikistan was created on 11/28/86 along with similar foundations throughout the Soviet Union in the Gorbachev era. This was the brainchild of academician Likhachev. The foundation has a board of directors whose members are chosen from among prominent academicians and governors. As a creation of the Gorbachev era, the foundation is independent of the state. Its budget comes through activities like organizing lotteries, selling books, and showing films. The foundation is a non-political establishment whose goal is the promotion of cultural activities. In spite of its small size, the foundation has already done a formidable job.

Theater in Tajikistan

Theater came to Tajikistan in the late 1920s. The first state theater group was founded in 1929 in Dushanbe. Today there are eleven state theater groups in the country. Theater artists used to have a tenure for life and enjoyed all the benefits granted to the artistic community. Things have changed drastically since then.

Aharun Theater Group

During perestroika artistic activities blossomed. In those years a number of independent theater groups started operation, but only one, Aharun, has survived. Despite the determination and hard work of the group, even Aharun's continued operation is in doubt.

The group was founded in 1988 in Dushanbe. "Independent" is a misnomer since even Aharun receives 60% of its budget from the municipality of Dushanbe. The group earns the other 40% itself, through selling tickets and other means such as donations. The disastrous economic situation resulting from the civil war has caused a serious reduction in both sources. The worsening economic situation is not the only problem. Lack of security on the streets and the nighttime curfew force people to rush to their homes after work, leaving them no time to spend in theaters.

All members of the group are graduates of reputable schools of the former Soviet Union. Unlike state theater groups, Aharun signs one-year contracts with its new employees, and renewal of the contracts are not automatic. Unless outside help comes to the rescue, Aharun will meet the same fate as that of the other independent groups.

Folklore Studies in Tajikistan

Folklore studies have a special place in Tajikistan. These studies have traditionally been carried out at the Rudaki Institute of Language and Literature in the Academy of Sciences. The institute has a department that conducts research in the field. The eight researchers of the institute go out to the villages and towns three months a year and make recordings. They do not restrict their studies to Tajikistan. All areas with Tajik population are covered. In fact, a large part of their research has been among the large population of Tajiks in Uzbekistan. (Though officially registered as Uzbeks, the majority of the residents of the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and the villages in that area of Uzbekistan are Tajik. In fact, the number of Tajiks in Uzbekistan is apparently higher than those in Tajikistan).

Behzad Museum of Art and History in Dushanbe

Founded in 1934, the Behzad Museum of Art and History in Dushanbe is Tajikistan's most important museum. The museum building is one of Dushanbe's architectural highlights, but the contents of the museum do not live up to its facade. As all museums in the capitals of the former Soviet republics, it has a section on natural history, a section on the history of the republic as interpreted by the standard socialist view promulgated by Moscow, and a section on art collections. There are 57,000 items on display at the museum. Aside from stone and wildlife samples of the region, few original artworks are actually on display in the Behzad Museum. They are mostly replicas, the originals being kept in the museums in Moscow, Leningrad, or Tashkent.

Almaty Kurmangazy State Conservatory in Kazakhstan

Almaty State Conservatory is one of the best conservatories in the CIS. Founded in 1944, it celebrated its 50th anniversary in October 1994.

Applicants to the conservatory typically come from music schools. These are four-year institutions that are found in provinces across the country. Admittance is highly competitive and is administered through annual entrance examinations. The students entering the conservatory, therefore, already have a knowledge of theory and experience in playing a musical instrument. A group of applicants sign up in the school without taking the entrance examination. These come from among the staff of state institutions and music schools. They are sent by their employers, who pay for their education, for training or acquiring special skills. The conservatory admits another category of students as well. These are “people’s artists” from villages who have not had any formal music education, and who nevertheless exhibit outstanding talent. The school offers a special two-year preparatory program for these students.

The conservatory has 850 students, 250 of which are signed up in the People’s Music program. The ethnic composition of the students has undergone a drastic change. Whereas previously the Russians from all over the Soviet Union made up the majority of the students, today they are mainly Kazakhs. Students from neighboring republics like Kyrgyzstan, and other countries such as China, South Korea, and Mozambique have also been admitted at the request of their governments. The conservatory has lost a large number of its talented staff since independence. They were mainly Russians, Germans, and Jews who migrated to Russia, Germany, and Israel. The brightest graduates of Kazakhstan’s music conservatory are lured to Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and the West for better pay and more promising careers.

This is the only music conservatory in the republic of Kazakhstan. Almaty Kurmangazy State Conservatory, itself, is going through very hard times. The budget barely covers staff salaries and the student scholarships. No money is left for the maintenance of the present facilities, growth of the institution, oversees tours, or even sending of the staff abroad for further training.

National Film Company of Kazakhstan

As in the rest of Central Asia, cinema came to Kazakhstan in 1940s. Because of the War, the film industry in Moscow moved eastward. A number of outstanding Kazakh actors and directors emerged as a result. Cinema, like other art forms, has been financed by the government. During perestroika, private studios were permitted to operate. Today, there are twenty five private studios in Kazakhstan. Kazakh Film is a government owned film company. Because of financial difficulties there are plans to turn it into a public company.

The National Film Company acts as a de facto ministry of cinema. It has 17000 employees and branches in the nineteen provinces of the republic. It produces films and manages and regulates the industry. The company created a committee to receive proposals from film-makers. Those that are approved by the committee will receive financial support and other necessary facilities.

Previously, the entire budget would be supplied by the state, while today the government has a supporting role. Additional funds should come from elsewhere. Various ways of acquiring funds from alternative sources are under study. One such alternative tried by the National Film Company is joint ventures with foreign film companies. Joint projects with the French and with the Russians have been undertaken. Funding remains a major problem.

The House of Culture in Tukumuk, Kyrgyzstan

Tukumuk is an industrial town whose population is 70% Russian. The House of Culture in Tukumuk has an auditorium with a capacity of 540 persons, a library, a ballroom, a smaller auditorium, a discotheque, a barber's shop, and additional space for miscellaneous activities. The smaller auditorium is reserved for amateur musicians and dancers who perform for local audiences. For performances, the house also provides them with musical instruments and costumes. Two amateur people's theater groups are permanently housed there - one Russian and one Kyrgyz. The house also has a senior citizens' chorus and an amateur contemporary band that performs Russian folk songs.

Almost all of the town's social activities and gatherings take place here. On the average every two to three days there is an event held in the house. The house of culture also offers

vocational training courses, such as typing and sewing, for the public at a fee. These classes used to be free.

The house of culture in Tukmuk, as all houses of culture, receives its budget from the state. Since the introduction of perestroika, it has been allowed to charge for its services and earn supplementary income. Forty two people work full-time in the house. This includes everyone from the doorman to the director. There is a membership fee, half of which goes for subsidizing the classes offered by the house.

Opera and Ballet in Kyrgyzstan

As in other Central Asian republics, opera and ballet were introduced by the Russians. After more than half a century, many Kyrgyz artists have joined the field. However, compared to other genres of music and art, opera and ballet have the highest percentage of Russians and Germans in them. The official emphasis on Kyrgyz culture since independence has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the future of the Russian community. This uncertainty, coupled with diminishing financial support for artistic activities, has lured the best and most promising ballet and opera stars - many of whom are Russian - to Moscow or Western countries. Despite that, opera and ballet have maintained their place among Kyrgyzstan's art and culture. The most prominent opera ballet theater is the one in Bishkek. Meldobaev State Opera Ballet Theater was founded in 1937 and is thus one of the oldest cultural institutions in Kyrgyzstan. It has five hundred employees, eighty of whom are ballet dancers.

State Radio and Television Company of Kyrgyzstan

The head of the company, who is designated by the president, has the ranking of a minister and takes part in cabinet meetings when necessary. The company has offices in the capitals of all the six provinces of the country. There are various departments in the company. These include information, economics, social affairs, children's, youth, music, and international relations departments. Twelve hundred people work for the company, 570 of whom are artists, singers, dancers, and musicians. The State Television Company also airs films produced by

Telefilm, a government owned company that produces films for the state television. It, too, is facing severe financial difficulties.

The National Library of Kyrgyzstan

The Library is sixty years old. There are fifty four libraries in the provinces and twelve hundred in the villages. They are all part of a network of libraries in the country. The National Library does not belong to the network. Before independence, it too belonged to the Soviet system of libraries centered in Moscow, which included all the libraries, large and small, in the empire. Every library had a contract with the central book distributing agency, according to which books published in Moscow would be received by the libraries throughout the Soviet Union. That system is no longer in operation. The government has ordered that a copy of every book published in the country to be sent to the National Library. The library also purchases books on its own.

The library is under the ministry of culture and receives its budget from there. The purchasing power of the library has been reduced considerably. Whereas previously 150,000 books were received annually, today the figure is only ten to fifteen thousand. The library is not a specialized one, but rather a general library carrying books in all different fields. It holds over 5,000,000 titles.

Membership used to be free, but today there is a nominal fee. University students, researchers, and the general public are the patrons of the Library. Scholars from scientific and research institutions constituted up to 70% of the members. But today most of the members are students. Books are loaned out to researchers and scholars for up to twenty five days. Up to ten books can be loaned to each individual, but students can not borrow books for reading outside of the library.

The Writers' Association of Turkmenistan

The association had various bureaus, including short stories, poetry, translation, and a bureau that was responsible for approving membership of new applicants. The latter has been eliminated. In fact, since independence, the Writers' Association has lost almost all of its power

and prerogatives. There is a fund to which each member contributes, and which helps retired members. The association owns a resort in the town of Firusa for members and their family. Both the fund and the resort existed under the Soviet regime. The association has two hundred members. Young poets and writers are not members of the association. Only those who have established themselves in the writers' community, and have published at least one book, are admitted.

Books that are approved are handed over to the Government Publication Bureau. The bureau takes orders from provinces and decides the number of copies that will be printed. Writers can publish their works independently, but it would cost a lot and is beyond the means of most members. The shortage of paper, and obsolete printing facilities, is a problem. The association's magazine, *Diyar*, is printed in Turkey for better quality.

The Institute for Preservation of Manuscripts in Turkmenistan

The restrictive policies of the Communist Party in the 1920s on books written in Arabic - especially those considered to be religious - resulted in the burning and burying of thousands of valuable manuscripts. Since independence an institute has been created for the preservation of manuscripts. It is hoped that the institute will be able to locate and gather the manuscripts from across Turkmenistan.

Conclusion

The seventy-year communist rule managed, with reasonable success, to inculcate in the minds of its peoples a sense of citizenship of a grand political unit called the Soviet Union. Under that system artistic and cultural activities were directed, supported, and monitored by the state. A system of institutions was created that managed every aspect of art and culture. The system rewarded artists, musicians, and writers liberally and placed them among the political elite in Soviet society. The state was the sole patron of art without whose support and sanction artistic and cultural activities could not take place. The central support and coordination from Moscow afforded the community the possibility to travel throughout the empire and around the

world. It also provided them the opportunity to present their work to a large audience beyond their own republics.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has inevitably brought into question the role of art and culture in society. Along with the disappearance of Moscow's support and direction there has appeared a sense of confusion and, in some cases, chaos in the Central Asian states. As the peoples of Central Asia are trying to come to terms with their new identity as citizens of independent nation-states, the issue of cultural identity becomes even more relevant. Predicting where art and culture is headed in Central Asia will, to a great extent, be a matter of guesswork. One may, however, assume the following with some degree of certainty:

- 1- The content of art and culture will increasingly become free from socialist ideology.
- 2- There will be no major changes in the role of the state. The state will remain the main patron of art for some time to come.
- 3-The institutions that presently support artistic and cultural activities (the filarmony, houses of culture, etc.) will continue to be the main centers for such activities in Central Asia.
- 4- The transition will not be homogeneous; rather, it will be different in each republic. The degree of change will depend on various factors, including the degree of continuity in the political structure of each country after independence, the level of relative prosperity, the presence of social tensions or civil wars, the degree to which each republic will be in contact with the outside world, especially the West.

Based on these assumptions, one may hazard a guess as follows:

-In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where there has been the least amount of change in the country's political structure, and minimal disruption in the economic activities, art and culture will continue to flourish under state control and patronage. The state will continue to determine the content of art and culture. However, rather than socialism it will be centered more around nationalism and ethnic identity.

-In Kazakhstan, where there is a large and influential Russian minority, the emphasis on Kazakh identity will be less pronounced, though present. The influence of Western culture will be more than that in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

-In Kyrgyzstan, where meaningful attempts have been under way to move towards a democratic state, freer expression of artistic and cultural sentiments will probably be observed. With it one may assume that the state and the institutions created under the Soviet system might, in the long run, have a diminished role in art and culture.

-In Tajikistan prospects for artistic and cultural activities seem bleak. The smallest and poorest republic in Central Asia, it is one of the richest in terms of art and culture. The civil war that erupted shortly after independence has caused the disintegration of the society and the deepening of the economic crisis has seriously undermined artistic and cultural activities. Thousands of writers and artists have either been killed, become refugees, or emigrated to other countries.

Art and culture have been undermined in Tajikistan in yet another way. The concentration of the Tajik population in Central Asia is in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Ferghana valley, which today are part of Uzbekistan. Dividing Central Asia into distinct republics based on the ethnic population in each region was an arbitrary act by Stalin that took place mainly for political considerations rather than actual ethnic character of each region. Major centers of Tajik population and culture were placed under Uzbek suzerainty. Under the Soviet Union such divisions were not of great significance; as citizens of the Soviet Union Tajiks could move freely to Uzbekistan. Today, newly erected national borders separate three million Tajiks of Tajikistan from up to seven million Tajiks in Uzbekistan. With the Uzbek government keen on promoting Uzbek identity and culture, state support and funding for Persian language, literature, and culture goes for promotion of Uzbek culture instead. These are the concerns that are vehemently expressed by Tajik intellectuals.

- Finally, the media may prove to be the most important agent of cultural change in Central Asia. Private television stations and satellite programs are becoming powerful agents in promoting Western style consumerism and a restricted aspect of Western culture.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on a study, originally meant for UNESCO, that started in 1993. The information was gathered mainly through visits to centers of artistic and cultural activities and interviews with officials of ministries of culture, radio and television organizations, heads of writers' associations, writers, musicians, dancers, librarians, etc. Some of the individuals interviewed were the following:

In Kazakhstan, Mr. Alpiyev, Deputy Minister of Culture; Baghdad Teleganov, Director of Sazgen Music and Dance Group; Dr. Kaskabasov, member of the Academy of Science; Professor D. Kaseynov, Rector, Almaty Kurmangazi State Conservatory; Leyla Beketova, President, Television and Radio corporation of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Kinis Duisikiev, Director, the Symphonic Orchestra of Television and Radio; Oraz Rymshanov, President, National Film Company of Kazakhstan; Naymanbayev Kaldarbek, First secretary, Board of Writers' Union; Dr. Kaskabasov, Professor of Philology, Member of the Academy of sciences; Professor Erden Zada-uly Kazhibekov, Director, Center for Oriental Studies.

In Kyrgyzstan, Osman Aqan Ibrahimov, Deputy Minister of Culture; Mr. zalleqbek, Director, The House of Culture in Tukmuk; Mr. Karimbayev, Director, Bishkek Filarmoni; Hesengol Jom'ebayev, Director, Qanbar Khan Folklore Music and Dance Group; Tilgin Tomotoyov, Director, Qaramalda Orazov People's Instrument Orchestra; Asel Bashev, Director, Aqmaral Dance Group; Asan Dzhakshylykov, First Secretary, The Writers' Union; Amirbek Osmanov, First Deputy Director, State Radio and Television; Zoya Esambayova, Director, The National Library; Mr. bazarbayev, Minister of Culture.

In Tajikistan, Mr. Taleb, Deputy Minister of Culture; Mr. Azizmorad Rajabov, Director, Center for People's productions; Zafar Nazem, Director, Ganjina Music Ensemble; Professor Mohammad Jan Shakurov, Member of the Academy of Science; Askar Hakim, President, Writers' Association; Mr. Hamza, Director, Cultural Foundaton of Tajikistan; Farrokh Qasem, Director, Aharun Theater Group; Borzu Abdurrazaqov, Director, Mayakawski State Russian Dramatic Theater; Ata Mohammadjanov, President, Association of [Theater] Artists; Professor Rawshan Rahman, Director, The Institute for Folklore Studies.

In Turkmenistan, Yurlaman Nuriev, Director, Chartash Mohammad People's Instruments Orchestra; Bayram Khodanazarov, First Secretary, The Writers' Association.