



Caucasus and Central Asia Newsletter

The Caucasus and Central Asia Program

at the University of California, Berkeley

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Caucasus and Central Asia Program
University of California, Berkeley
260 Stephens Hall #2304
Berkeley, CA 94720-2304
<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/caucasus/>

Editors: Sanjyot Mehendale and Andrée Kirk
Content and Design: Kalynn Yastro

Please send suggestions, corrections, or inquiries to
ccasp@berkeley.edu.

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Notes from the Executive Director

Sanjyot Mehendale

Sometimes things that look extremely good on paper turn out in the execution to be less than one had hoped for. Happily, this semester just the opposite was true for CCASP's two-month long program titled *Modes of Contemporary Central Asian Culture*, which exceeded even the high expectations we had for it. Seeking to combine the work of contemporary artists with humanities and social sciences scholarship, this program included two modern painting exhibits, a conference and an art panel. Concurrently, the series *Films from Along the Silk Road: Central Asian Cinema* was organized at the Pacific Film Archive. The logistics of the program were tackled by CCASP program assistant Kalynn Yastro and graduate student Uranchimeg Tsultem (History of Art) who worked tirelessly over the summer communicating with artists in Kazakhstan and Mongolia, selecting works and organizing travel. I am happy to report that all survived and the program created was truly unique in CCASP history.

The *Modes of Contemporary Central Asian Culture Program* focused on (re)constructed identities in Central Asia. As Soviet myths were and continue to be discarded, what new archetypes are being created? Is there a Central Asian identity and, if so, how does it manifest itself? What are the reflections of Islamic, Soviet, ethnic, and national identities?

The program brought to the campus four well-known painters from Central Asia. Kazakh artist Saule Suleimenova exhibited her paintings at the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities. A well-established artist, Saule formally studied design in Almaty and London. She has participated in many local and international exhibitions since 1987 and her works are found in galleries and private collections in Kazakhstan, Russia, Europe and the US. Saule's two-month residence at UC Berkeley also provided for rich exchanges with faculty and students. In addition, the *Modern Visions from Mongolia* exhibit at the Worth Ryder Gallery presented the work of three well-known Mongolian artists, M. Erdenebayar, J. Munkhsetseg and S. Tugs-Oyun.

The exhibits explored viewers', in this case American viewers', preconceived notions about Central Asian identities. Kazakhstan and Mongolia in American consciousness is still strongly circumscribed by images of pastoral nomadic tribes roaming the harsh, endless steppes of Central Asia. These exhibits offered viewers new ways of looking at the dynamic nature of modern Central Asian art.

In addition to the exhibits, we had a very exciting fifth annual CCAsP conference that brought together scholars and artists to participate in an innovative forum on contemporary Central Asia. The conference not only highlighted the political and economic transformations of Central Asia, but also the individual experiences resulting from these trends and influences. Through an examination of the region's arts and other cultural forms, it attempted to take a different view of the changing realities of Central Asian societies.

The conference was greatly enhanced by the Central Asia film series that ran concurrently at the Pacific Film Archive, giving students and faculty a chance to familiarize themselves with Soviet and Post-Soviet films produced in Central Asia. Several very interesting papers were presented during the conference, summaries of which can be found in this newsletter, as well as the full text of a piece by Prof. Michael Rouland titled *Beyond the New Wave: The Return to Folklore in Serik Aprymov's The Hunter*.

The final Modes program event in October was the *Modern Art from Mongolia* panel featuring keynote speaker Uranchimeg Tsultem followed by a lively discussion with Prof. Pat Berger (History of Art) and Mongolian artists M. Erdenebayar, S. Tugs-Oyun and J. Munkhtsetseg.

The Modes program would not have been possible without the help of several people. Special thanks go to Uranchimeg Tsultem whose insights were instrumental in organizing the Mongolian painting exhibit, to Matthew Tiews, Executive Director of the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, and Kevin Radley, Curator of the Worth Ryder Gallery.

Finally, this issue of the CCAsP newsletter also includes *Russia's Strategy in the Caucasus: Is Soft Power Part of the Game?* by Andrei P. Tsygankov, a paper presented in spring, 2005 at the XXIXth Annual Berkeley-Stanford Conference titled *The Caucasus: Culture, History, Politics*.



Artist J. Munkhtsetseg, left, and artist Saule Suleimenova



Opening night: The *Modern Visions from Mongolia* exhibit at the Worth Ryder Gallery



Artist S. Tugs-Oyun



Visitors at the opening of *Kazakh: Paintings by Saule Suleimenova*



Visitors at the Mongolian exhibit



Graduate student organizer of the Mongolian exhibit Ts. Uranchimeg, right, with guest.

Russia's Strategy in the Caucasus: Is Soft Power Part of the Game?

By Andrei P. Tsygankov

“We are yet to use sufficiently well the existing potential of influence including the historical credits of trust and friendship, the close ties that link the peoples of our countries ... The absence of Russia's effective policy in the CIS, or even an unjustified slowdown, inevitably leads to an active filling of this political space by other more active states.”

Vladimir Putin¹

1. Introduction

What are Russia's interests and strategy in the former Soviet region, particularly in the Caucasus? Moscow's recent reluctance to dismantle its military bases in Georgia, ongoing exercise of force in Chechnya, occasional promises to “preventively” use military force outside its own territory to respond to terrorist threats, ties with separatist leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the eagerness to gain control over some strategic assets in Armenia and Georgia prompted pundits to speculate that Russia seeks to preserve its imperial power in the region. An influential group of scholars and former policymakers expressed concern over Russia's “return to rhetoric of militarism and empire, and by a refusal to comply with ... international treaty obligations.”² Others went as far as to speculate that Russia's talk of using preventive force was in fact a pretext for invading Georgia.³ Still others proposed that Russia is satisfied with the status quo, but will continue to seek instability and war in the region.⁴

This paper argues that although there is ample evidence of instability in the Caucasus it is not sufficient to support the claim that Russia intends to maintain instability or exercise imperial control in the region. Just as plausibly, this evidence can be interpreted as an effort by Moscow to preserve existing influence in the Caucasus for the purpose of its greater stabilization. Russia cannot be denied its own political, military, and economic interests in the region, and Moscow's attempts to defend those interests ought not be confused with a desire to obtain exclusive control there. To substantiate this argument, this paper draws on the concept of soft power, first introduced by Joseph Nye for understanding

America's influence in the world.⁵ By contrast, Russia's soft power and its potential remain relatively unexplored.⁶ Following Nye's lead, the paper explores how Russia seeks to co-opt, rather than coerce, others—one of the definitions of soft power⁷—by promoting the attractiveness of its cultural values, political legitimacy, and economic interdependence in the region.

More specifically, I argue two points. First, that Russia is looking to stabilize the area, and not to maintain instability there. Second, that in attempting to achieve greater stabilization, Moscow employs both hard and soft power in the area, with soft power growing, although not yet leading the way. Today's Russia has much greater resources at its disposal than did Russia under Boris Yeltsin, yet it progressively uses those resources to increase the use of soft power in the region. The hardest region for arguing the point is, of course, the Caucasus, due to Moscow's persistent dependence on military means in its stabilization efforts there. This results from a highly volatile mixture of ethnic and clan loyalties that led some analysts to characterize the Caucasus as the Eurasian Balkans.⁸ Therefore, if Moscow manages to increase the use of soft power in its policies in the Caucasus, it should be in an even better position to do so elsewhere in post-Soviet Eurasia. Although Moscow's soft power is unlikely to replace the hard power of military and economic coercion any time soon—certainly not in the Caucasus—its progressive employment may assist Russia in finding an appropriate foreign policy balance in the area.

The paper is organized into four parts. The next section discusses the role of soft power in Russia's

foreign policy objectives. Section 3 provides an overview of Russia's considerably strengthened soft power in the region relative to the first half of the 1990s. Section 4 specifies Russia's interests and soft power potential in the North and South Caucasus, and it evaluates the overall impact of the soft power policies in the area. The paper concludes by reflecting on a future role of soft power in Russia's foreign policy and the implications it has for Western behavior in the region.

2. Soft Power and Russia's Foreign Policy Objectives

This paper broadens Nye's definition of soft power. Understood as the power to influence others through cooptation, rather than coercion, soft power has three components: political legitimacy, economic interdependence, and cultural values. Political legitimacy includes institution-building and leadership credibility. Economic interdependence refers to the attractiveness to others of the home economy's labor markets and financial or trade systems. Finally, cultural values are defined here as the attractiveness of linguistic, religious, educational, and historical features, as well as technological products, such as software and DVDs. Soft power therefore includes all aspects of a nation's attractiveness to foreigners: political credibility, a large and efficient economy, familiar language and religion, aspects of historical legacy, family ties, electronic products, etc. It speaks to people and societies, not governments and elites.

In all these areas, Russia has special advantages in the former Soviet region, and the authorities are increasingly demonstrating their readiness to employ soft power to serve foreign policy objectives. Solidifying influence in the former Soviet region is undoubtedly the most important way in which soft power can assist Russia. President Putin's references to the "historic unity of people" in the former Soviet region,⁹ the appointment of Modest Kolerov in charge of the special department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the CIS at the Kremlin, and a recent analysis by the National Security Council of Moldova's economic and cultural dependencies on Russia¹⁰ indicate the growing awareness by Moscow of the need to pay attention to soft power potential. In the absence of pro-Russian governments in Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere, the task of mobilizing ties among peoples,

rather than governments, becomes especially important in preserving influence.

One can identify several other ways in which soft power can assist Russia in achieving its foreign policy objectives. First, it offers an effective response to the above-cited charges of Russia's imperialism and militarism, given soft power's ability to facilitate cooptation and positive, rather than zero, sum potential in bilateral relations. Second, in the long run, employing soft power may facilitate solutions to problems of terrorism and separatism at home, as reliance on the power of example has considerable potential to diffuse the appeal of hard-liners and to attract moderates.

Finally, Moscow's more active use of soft power may assist Russia in solving its ongoing identity debate. In that debate, Westernizers insist that Russia has no independent geopolitical identity outside the West and should therefore gear its foreign policy to those of Western nations.¹¹ Westernizers are opposed to the so-called Eurasianists, who view Russia as a land-based civilization with strong ties to the former Soviet region, Asia, and the Muslim world. Eurasianist roots are in Russia's traditionalist philosophy that has always seen Russian values as principally different from—and often superior to—those of Western civilization.¹² Westernizers and Eurasianists represent two poles of cultural identification, and Russia has yet to resolve this cultural debate. Employing soft power can help the Kremlin to strengthen Russia's ties in Eurasia, thereby redressing the appeal of Eurasianists while preserving Putin's pro-Western and pro-European¹³ foreign policy thrust. Influence in post-Soviet Eurasia might then be strengthened without revising existing territorial boundaries, depriving neighbors of their political sovereignty, or taking on the burden of an imperial responsibility. There are signs of growing influence of precisely this kind of discourse in Russia's political circles.¹⁴

3. The Rise of Russia's Soft Power in Eurasia

Today's Russia is considerably more confident than the Russia of Boris Yeltsin. During 1999-2003, the economy more than doubled and continues to grow at an annual rate of 4-5%. Putin's leadership is also more pragmatic in its assessment of threats than its predecessors. For Putin, the key threats come not from the United States but from terrorist activities and those nations falling

behind in economic development. Although the Kremlin is wary of the US's policies and intentions, it prefers engagement of Western partners into joint projects to balancing tactics that had been previously attempted by Yeltsin's second Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov.¹⁵

Russia has taken a more realistic look at the CIS and no longer views it as a vehicle for geopolitical integration of the post-Soviet region. In February 2001, the then Secretary of the Security Council, Sergei Ivanov, announced a new course, publicly acknowledging that previous attempts to integrate the CIS came at a very high price and that Russia must now abandon the integration project in favor of a "pragmatic" course of bilateral relations. By the time this announcement was made, the CIS states' debt to Russia had reached \$5.5 billion.¹⁶ In addition, Putin planned to step up cooperation in issues of counter-terrorism and assemble his own coalition of the willing in the region. The new vision of the region entails a more open, multi-level politico-economic space, planned by the Russian state, but built with the close participation of Russia's private sector. The Kremlin also cautioned foreign policy elites against calling for exclusive leadership of Russia and claiming a monopoly over the affairs in the region.¹⁷

The new vision brought about some visible results in terms of Russia's leadership and institution-building in the region. In the economic area, a notable development was the creation of an economic agreement with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, which aimed at eliminating trade barriers and devising shared energy transport policies. In the area of security, Russia concentrated on counter-terrorist activities by developing the Shanghai Five, with China as a prominent member, to address terrorism and the security vacuum in Central Asia. Even Uzbekistan, the Central Asian state most interested in reducing Moscow's power in the region, was now inclined to cooperate with Russia. In addition, Russia's long advocated collective security action in Central Asia transformed the old Tashkent treaty into a full-fledged regional defense pact. In April 2003, six states—Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia—formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), pledging to pool their resources to fight terrorism in the area.

In the area of economic interdependence, the most visible result of Russia's soft power is a massive migration of labor into Russia. Although many still work illegally, the official statistics account for 3 million

immigrant workers.¹⁸ The net migration over the 1991-2004 period comprised 5.6 million people.¹⁹ As a result, in 2003 Russia came out third after the US and Germany, and second only to the US in 2004 in the rate of mass immigration into the country.²⁰

Finally, there is a considerable increase in the attractiveness of Russian cultural values in the region. Beginning in October 2001 with the Congress of Russian compatriots in Moscow, the Kremlin, assisted by the regions, has been allocating funds to support Russian diasporas in the post-Soviet area. Such funds grew by 20% in 2004.²¹ Russia has also devised a federal program, "Russian Language" led by the president's wife, Lyudmila Putin. Slavic universities have been successfully functioning in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Despite the efforts by nationalist elites in the Soviet successor states to squeeze out Russian language from public and social life, millions continue to prefer to converse and do business in Russian. In the words of a prominent scholar, the Russian language has been revived as a regional *lingua franca*—the language of commerce, employment, and education—and is no longer "readily perceived as the instrument of the old imperial domination and political pressure that it was in the 1990s."²² In addition, Moscow is increasingly aware of new opportunities presented by electronic media. Russian language is ranked number 10 by popularity on the Internet,²³ and it dominates the region. Many people in the region also watch Russia's television networks and prefer them to those of the West—partly because of the language barrier, and partly because of the already established historic ties.²⁴

4. Even in the Caucasus

Undoubtedly, the Caucasus is a special case. Plagued by the weakness of political institutions, regional instability, and ethnic separatism, the three Southern Caucasus states also border Chechnya and the terrorism-ridden North Caucasus. A growing number of terrorist incidents in Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Northern Ossetiya, and Karachayevo-Cherkessiya leave for the Kremlin few options but to increase its military presence there and improve security measures in the short run. However, in a more long-term perspective soft power may find a greater place in Moscow's policies in the region.

Because of a mixture of security, economic, and cultural considerations, the Caucasus occupies a special place in Russia's foreign policy. Russia's security interests require an environment free of political instability and threats of terrorism. Yet all three Southern Caucasus states can hardly be called economically and politically viable.²⁵ The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also adds to the regionally unstable environment. The Rose Revolution in Georgia has not sufficiently strengthened the state institutions which continue to be a cause of concern for Russia. Related to this is the concern that Georgian territory may continue to be used by international terrorists as a transit point on their way to Chechnya. In the past, Pankisi Gorge and several other Georgian areas near the border with Chechnya were known to have terrorist camps.

Russia's economic interests include the need to protect energy pipelines, particularly the Transcaspian one that stretches from Dagestan to Novorossiysk. Energy continues to consist the largest part of Russia's exports, and the share of foreign trade with European nations is up to 55%.²⁶ Without the reliable protection of energy transportation, Russia's energy-export dependent economy is in an extremely risky position. In addition, Russia has greatly expanded its business interests and is eager to protect those interests in the area. In particular, it has secured partnerships with Azerbaijan through the division of Caspian resources. In Georgia, Russia's state electric company obtained the right to be the main electricity provider, and in Armenia it obtained several strategic assets such as an atomic electric station to offset a debt of 40 million dollars. Finally, Moscow's cultural interests in the area include the need to maintain ties with ethnic Russians and all those who continue to gravitate toward Russia.

All these interests are best met in some kind of joint arrangement with the participation of Russia, South Caucasian, and Western nations. Such a collective security arrangement may discourage Russians from taking a hard line toward Georgia and Chechnya, and Georgians from resorting to military confrontation with its separatist territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the long run, such inclusive arrangements may also better serve the West in building the required trust with Moscow than measures, such as the construction of the Baku-Ceihan pipeline or the establishment of GUAM, that have no place for Russia's participation. Such an approach may eventually soothe the old geopolitical fears that the West has an interest in instability in the

Caucasus, to prevent Russia from getting stronger and developing ties with its Eastern partners.²⁷

As a positive sum game, Russia's soft power may facilitate establishment of a collective security system in the region. In the area of institution building, not much has been accomplished beyond establishing the "Caucasus quartet." However, the degree of trust in Russia's leadership among local ethnic groups is encouraging. Even in Chechnya, with all the brutalities of the recent war, the overwhelming majority seems to favor remaining a part of Russia. According to one poll conducted in August 2003, 78% of residents of Chechnya supported membership in the Russian Federation, whereas only 19% were against it.²⁸ Some evidence from surveys in Dagestan, the largest ethnic territory in the North Caucasus, too, indicate strong support for Russian leadership. For instance, one poll indicated that "in case of acute crisis," 64% of Dagestani prefer Russia's federal leadership, relative to 43% trusting local leadership or relatives.²⁹ The desire of Southern Ossetians and Abkhazians to obtain citizenship of Russia is well known, and it too reflects the potential for Moscow to play an important pacifying role in the region.

Even more impressive is Russia's soft power in the area of economic and cultural interdependence. In 2004, average salaries in Russia were 3 times higher than in Armenia and Georgia and 2.5 times higher than in Azerbaijan.³⁰ Combined with generous energy subsidies and high share of trade with Russia—40 to 50%³¹—this makes the Russian economy particularly attractive to foreign labor from the Caucasus. By some calculations, some 2 million Azeris, 1 million Armenians, and 0.5 million Georgians work in Russia and send home remittances that have become a critical factor in sustaining local economies. In the case of Georgia, the amount of remittances reaches \$1 million annually which amounts to 20-25% of Georgian GDP.³² The amount would have been unquestionably higher where it not for the visa regime that had been imposed by Russia since December 2000. In addition to the above-mentioned significance of the Russian language and cultural goods, growth of immigration into Russia from the South Caucasus has been considerable. Most of these immigrants settled in the North Caucasus, where the population increased from 13.2 to 17.7 million over the 1989-1998 period.³³

The impressive growth of Russia's soft power prompted Fiona Hill to observe: "Russia's biggest

contribution to security of its southern flank in the last decade has been not through its military presence on bases ... but through absorbing the surplus (especially male) labor of the Caucasus and Central Asian states, providing markets for their goods, and transferring funds in the form of remittances rather than as foreign aid.³⁴ Although not the panacea, the rise of Russia's soft power in the Caucasus may assist in further stabilization in the region.

5. Future of Russia's Foreign Policy in the Caucasus

The above-mentioned developments suggest that, although the situation in the Caucasus remains extremely difficult and requires measures of military security, there is growing room for the productive use of soft power. Continuing to capitalize on Russia's attractiveness to foreigners, as well as taking the initiative in constructing regional political and cultural norms, is vital for improving the security environment in the region.

In Chechnya, aggressive promotion of soft power is long overdue. Now that the main military operations are over, the government must find a way to rebuild the local economy and political institutions. With Moscow promising new elections and allocating greater resources for the region, there is some progress in this direction. However, the real issue remains that more than 40 percent of young Chechen males are unemployed and are actively recruited by terrorists.³⁵ Just as capturing Saddam Hussein did not help Iraq much, eliminating Aslan Maskhadov is likely to only marginally affect the situation in Chechnya. Without direct investments and job creation, any efforts to change the situation on the ground are likely to fail. Both polls and past elections in the republic show support for such economic measures, which become particularly important in the light of growing radicalization of the North Caucasus outside Chechnya.³⁶

In the South Caucasus, Russia too can do more to promote stabilization through soft power. For instance, the Russian economy will undoubtedly become even more attractive to Georgia if the visa regime is abolished and transportation networks, such as the old Soviet railroad, are restored. Moscow can also do much more to mold and pacify local elites by developing a system of education and establishing funds for reconstruction and assistance for the local states.³⁷ In addition, a greater

use of Russia's soft power would include mobilization of ties with societies, rather than states only, and establishment of contacts with the entire political spectrum in the neighboring nations. Extending support to regimes that violate their citizens' rights, however, should not become a common policy practice.

The West would do well to support the efforts by Russia to increase its soft power in the region. As a foreign policy tool, Russia's soft power serves objectives in the Caucasus that are compatible with those of Western nations—maintaining stability, respecting religious tolerance, and political pluralism. Russia's efforts should also be recognized as “normal” foreign policy means that are not uncharacteristic of other great powers, including attempts to influence other nations economically, politically, and culturally without formally violating their sovereignty. In the past, Western attempts to pressure Russia to negotiate with Maskhadov and withdraw from the Southern Caucasus region have not been successful. Without explicit and unequivocal recognition of Russia's territorial integrity and legitimate interests in the Caucasus, such attempts, instead, contributed to a greater mistrust of Western intentions. Among those legitimate interests are political stability, the security of energy pipelines, the growth of trade and investment, and the well-being of ethnic Russians. Although critics prefer to emphasize the “imperialist” aspect of the ways in which the Kremlin uses economic and cultural ties in the former Soviet region, there is no escape from the simple fact that Russia will jeopardize its own stability if it refrains from attempting to deepen those ties.

In Joseph Nye's words, “smart power is neither hard nor soft. It is both.”³⁸ Hopefully, by capitalizing on the soft power aspect Moscow will find a proper balance in its foreign policy in the most volatile Caucasus region. Despite its messy post-communist politics, Russia remains an important ally and the West has more to gain than to lose from cooperating with it. In the future, joint counter-terrorist operations might be accompanied by cooperation efforts in economic and cultural areas, with the purpose of creating an environment that is vital for maintaining security in the long run.

Andrei P. Tsygankov is an Associate Professor in the Departments of International Relations / Political Science at San Francisco State University.
andrei@sfsu.edu

¹ Address at the Plenary Session of the Russian Federation Ambassadors, Moscow, Foreign Ministry, July 12, 2004 <www.kremlin.ru>

² Ahlin, Urban and other signatories, "An Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government Of the European Union and NATO," September 28, 2004, Johnson's Russia List, #24 JRL-8385 <<http://www.cdi.org>>

³ V. Socor, "Georgia Under Growing Russian Pressure Ahead of Bush-Putin Summit," *Russian and Eurasia Review* February 15, 2005 <www.jamestown.org>.

⁴ See for example, P. Baev, "Useful War," *Russian and Eurasia Review* 1, 14, September 17, 2002 <www.jamestown.org>.

⁵ J. S. Nye, Jr. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁶ The most prominent exception is work of F. Hill. See her *Energy Empire: Oil, Gas, and Russia's Revival* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2004); "Eurasia on the Move." Presentation at the Kennan Institute, September 27, 2004.

⁷ J. S. Nye, Jr. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 7.

⁸ Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), p. 123.

⁹ Putin, Address at the Plenary Session.

¹⁰ O. Kashin, "Vladimir Putin naznachil barkhatnogo kontrevolutsionera," *Kommersant*, March 22, 2005.

¹¹ Some statements by Westernizers include A. Kozyrev, *Preobrazheniye* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 1995) and D. Trenin, *The End of Eurasia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

¹² The literature of Eurasianism is growing. For some key statements, see A. Panarin, *Revansh Istoriyi* (Moskva: Logos, 1998); G. Zyuganov, *Geografiya pobedy* (Moskva: unknown publisher, 1999); A. Dugin, *Osnovy Yevraziystva* (Moskva: Arktogeia, 2002).

¹³ On Putin's Europeanism, see especially his Address to the Federation Council in March 2005 <www.kremlin.ru>

¹⁴ For instance, one of the Kremlin's advisors Gleb Pavlovski coined the term "Euro-East" which seeks to position Russia as culturally European, yet poised to preserve a special dominance in the former Soviet region. Along the same lines, the former Yeltsin's privatization tsar and currently the head of the Russia's state electric company Anatoli Chubais wrote that

Russia's main goal in the twenty first century should be to build up a "liberal empire" through the strengthening of its position in the former USSR. For details, see A. P. Tsygankov, "Cultural Connection Across Time and Space: The Civilizational Dimension of Russia's Foreign Policy," San Francisco State University, unpublished ms., 2005.

¹⁵ For development of this comparison, see A. P. Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, 2, 2005.

¹⁶ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 7, 2001.

¹⁷ Putin, Op. Cit.

¹⁸ Hill, "Eurasia on the Move," p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid. For higher figures, see V. R. Legoida, "Russkoyazychnaya diaspora v gosudarstvakh Tsentral'noi Azii i Zakavkazya," in: *Yuzhnyi flang SNG*, edited by M. M. Narinski and A. V. Mal'gin (Moskva: MGIMO, 2003), p. 64.

²⁰ Hill, "Eurasia on the Move," p. 3; A. A. Korobkov and Z. A. Zaichonkovskaia, "The changes in the migration patterns in the post-Soviet states," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, 2004, p. 496; L. Grafova, "Rossiyskaya migratsiya," *Izvestiya*, June 30, 2005.

²¹ E. V. Mitrofanova, "Russki mir" bez granits," *Rossiia v global'noi politike* 1, 2004.

²² Hill, "Eurasia on the Move," p. 8. These trends continue to embolden the officials to press for granting Russian official-language status in all CIS countries ("Foreign Ministry Urges Making Russian Official Language in CIS States," *RFE/RL Newslines*, September 26, 2003).

²³ R. Saunders, "Natsional'nost': kiberrusski," *Rossiia v global'noi politike* 4, 2004, p. 3.

²⁴ In May 2005, the Kremlin also announced the establishment of an international television network to broadcast in English to "improve Russia's image in the world."

²⁵ S. Blank, The failing states of the Caucasus. *Asia Times*, October 16, 2003.

²⁶ P. Hanson, "Joining but Not Signing Up? Russia's Economic 'Integration' Into Europe," *Russian and Eurasia Review* 2, 6, March 18, 2003 <www.jamestown.org>.

²⁷ Just like many in the West believe that Russia wants a weak and unstable Caucasus, many in Russia argue that Western nations want the same in order to lay their hands on Caspian energy (V. V. Degoyev, "Kavkazskiye gorizonty Bol'shoi Yevropy," *Rossiia v*

global'noi politike 5, 2004; S. S. Zhil'tsov, I. S. Zonn, and A. M. Ushkov, *Geopolitika Kaspiyskogo regiona* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodniye otnosheniya, 2003), p. 219; I. D. Zvyagel'skaya and D. V. Makarov, "Vospriyatiye Rossiyei politiki Zapada v Tsentral'noi Aziyi," in: *Yuzhnyi flang SNG*, edited by M. M. Narinski and A. V. Mal'gin (Moskva: MGIMO, 2003), p. 103). Even some pro-Western liberals in Russia are fearful that Georgia, emboldened by the US, may try to crush resistance from Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force thereby provoking new wave of instability in the region (A. Yaz'kova, "Kavkaz i Rossiya," *Vestnik Yevropy* 11, 2004). Multiple publications by Western pundits, like Zbigniew Brzezinski and Richard Pipes advocate independence for Chechnya (see, for example, R. Pipes, "Give the Chechens a Land of Their Own," *New York Times*, September 9, 2004) and only play into reinforcing these fears of the West.

²⁸ Public Opinion of the Chechen Population on the Actual Issues of the Republic. Results of Seven Representative Surveys Conducted March—August 2003. <http://www.validata.ru/e_e/chechnya/>, accessed in December 2003.

²⁹ R. B. Ware and others, "Stability in the Caucasus: The Perspective from Dagestan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, 2, 2003, p. 16.

³⁰ Korobkov and Zaichonkovskaia, Op. Cit., p. 488.

³¹ S. A. Karaganov, "Moskva i Tbilisi: nachat' snachala," *Rossiya v global'noi politike* 1, 2004; E. S. Kuznetsova, "Blizhneye zarubezhnye: vse dal'she ot Rossiyi," *Rossiya v global'noi politike* 5, 2004; S. I. Chernyavski, Politika Rossiyi v Tsentral'noi Aziyi i Zakavkazye v 1992-2002 godakh. in: *Yuzhnyi flang SNG*, edited by M. M. Narinski and A. V. Mal'gin (Moskva: MGIMO, 2003), p. 49-50.

³² Chernayvski, Op. Cit; Hill, *Energy Empire*, p. 26.

³³ Hill, "Eurasia on the Move," p. 3.

³⁴ Ibid, 9.

³⁵ N. Abdullaev, "Chechnya Ten Years Later," *Current History* October 2004, p. 336; This point was also strongly underscored by the current president Alu Alkhanov during his visit to Moscow earlier this year.

³⁶ On growing radicalization in the Northern Caucasus, see P. K. Baev, "The North Caucasus Slips Out of Control," *Russian and Eurasia Review* April 4, 2005 <www.jamestown.org>; L. Fuller, "North Caucasus: Dmitrii Kozak—Troubleshooter or Whipping Boy?" *Transition*, June 20, 2005. <www.rfel.org>

³⁷ Karaganov, Op. Cit; V. Frolov, "A CIS Safety Primer: Good Advice for Good Neighbors," *Russia Profile*, May 24, 2005. <www.russiaprofile.org>

³⁸ Nye, Op. Cit, p. xiii.

Faculty and Graduate Student News

Professor **Wali Ahmadi**, who teaches Persian literature at the Department of Near Eastern Studies, is a recipient of this year's Hellman Family Faculty Award. He is finishing the manuscript of a book on modern and contemporary literature in Afghanistan, entitled *Anomalous Visions: History and Form in the Modern Literature of Afghanistan*. Professor Ahmadi traveled to Afghanistan last summer and intends to go there again this coming summer. His scholarly interests include literary history, literary theory, and Persian literature throughout the Persian-speaking lands.

Harsha Ram, associate professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, has been awarded a Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Program grant to pursue research in Moscow and Tbilisi during fall 2005. In addition, the Modern Language Association awarded Professor Ram an honorable mention for his book *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*.

Regine Spector, Ph.D. candidate, Political Science, was awarded a BPS summer travel grant for the summer of 2005 and spent one month in Bishkek and one month in Moscow conducting preliminary research on her dissertation. She was also awarded a State Department fellowship administered by the William Davidson Institute for her dissertation project on bazaars and traders in the post-Soviet region (Central Asia in particular).

Cindy Huang, Ph.D. candidate, Anthropology, conducted fieldwork in Xinjiang, China during the summer of 2005. Cindy is also the recipient of a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans for two academic years, 2005 - 2007.

Beyond the New Wave: The Return to Folklore in Serik Aprymov's *The Hunter*

By Michael Rouland

Returning to the familiar theme of village life, Serik Aprymov offers a beautifully rendered Kazak interpretation of the classic coming-of-age film in *The Hunter* (2004). With his mingling of music and mythology, Aprymov provides arguably his most ambitious film to date. Urban, village, and nomadic worlds collide in the life of one young boy, Erken, who struggles to find his own path through them. As a whole, *The Hunter* tests the boundaries of the "Kazak New Wave" and explores the competing cultural influences around the Kazak *aul*, or village.

This paper offers a new look at contemporary Kazak cinema. Returning to the folkloric undertones and symbolic imagery of Central Asian cinema of the 1960s, Serik Aprymov's recent film, *The Hunter* (2004), complements totemic visions of nature with the struggles of everyday life by borrowing from earlier Central Asian responses to Italian Neorealism. In more majestic moments, he allows the beauty of the Central Asian mountain landscape to play a key role in his film. These techniques reflect a renewed appreciation for the early canon of Kazak and Kyrgyz cinema: films by Shaken Aimanov, Bolotbek Shamshiev, and Tolomush Okeev. Several episodes of these historically significant films play out directly, while others are reworked in Aprymov's new work.

The History of Kazak Film

The history of Kazak film has been traced back more than seventy years for various reasons. While earlier Soviet perspectives emphasized the cultural links between Russians and Kazaks including early Soviet

documentaries shot in Kazakstan in their narrative, more recent views take pride in their film's longevity. Nevertheless, the first documentaries had a distinctly socialist feel and exclusively addressed the creation of a new rail link between Kazakstan and Siberia in 1929: *Pribytie pervogo poezda v Alma-Atu* (*Arrival of the First Train to Alma-Ata*), *Turksib* (Viktor Turin's), and *Stal'noi Put'* (*The Steel Road*). Several years later, in 1934, the first Kazak film studio was created to make documentary films and newsreels, of these the most famous were the *Sovetskii Kazakstan* documentaries in the 1940s.

The Second World War sent shockwaves through Soviet artistic communities, but for

Central Asia it presented a unique cultural opportunity. Writers, artists, and filmmakers descended on the region to escape Leningrad and Moscow's plight. During the war, the Lenfilm, Mosfilm, and the Kiev Film Studios evacuated to Alma-Ata and created TsOKS, the Unified Central Film Studio. And as Sergei Eisenstein completed his great epic, *Ivan Groznyi*, young Kazak filmmakers gained first-hand experience from the Soviet film-masters. After the war, Kazakfilm emerged from the remnants of the Unified studio and the pre-existing documentary film studio. It took several more years, but Kazak filmmaking reached a new stage in the late-1950s and 1960s when Kazak directors began to make an impact.

While Kazak writers and artists consulted significantly on earlier films such as *Pesnia steppei* (1930), *Dzhut* (1932), *Amangel'dy* (1938), *Raikhan* (1940), *Pesni Abaia* (1945), I would begin Kazak film history with Shaken Aimanov's *A Poem about Love* (1954). Trained in the 1940s while the film industry was in Alma-Ata, Aimanov emerged as a filmmaker in



Kazakstan just as Khrushchev had relaxed the artistic confines of socialist realism.

Many surveys of Central Asian cinema overlook this key fact, but Central Asia experienced a real cultural awakening in the 1960s and 1970s, and several personalities lead this effort through film, especially in Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan: Shaken Aimanov (*Land of Our Fathers* (1967) and *End of the Ataman* (1970)); Bolotbek Shamshiev (*Shot in the Karash Pass* (1968), *The Red Poppies of Issyk Kul* (1972), *The White Ship* (1975), and *The Wolf Pit* (1983)); and Tolomush Okeev (*There are Horses* (1965), *Sky of Our Childhood* (1966), *The Fierce One* (1973), and *Descendant of a Snow Leopard* (1984)).

Two particularly significant personalities supplied these directors with a rich body of film material as well. Andrei Konchalovsky wrote several screenplays for Central Asia directors in addition to his own *First Teacher* (1965) based on an Aitmatov story: *Tashkent – City of Bread* (Shukhrat Abbasov, 1968), *A Song about Manshuk* (Mazhit Begalin, 1969), *End of the Ataman* (Shaken Aimanov, 1970) *The Seventh Bullet* (Ali Khamraev, 1972), and *The Fierce One* (Tolomush Okeev, 1974) based on a Mukhtar Auezov story. In addition, Chingis Aitmatov wrote the screenplays for a number of Central Asian films, including *Heat* (Larisa Shepitko, 1963), *Sky of Our Childhood* (Tolomush Okeev, 1966), *Farewell, Gulsary* (Sergei Urusevsky, 1968) *Dzhamilya* (Irina Poplavskaya, 1969), *The White Ship* (Bolotbek Shamshiev, 1976), *Early Cranes* (Bolotbek Shamshiev, 1979), and *Whirlwind* (Bako Sadykov, 1988).

Arguably the most influential film director in the region was the Kyrgyz, Tolomush Okeev. While Aitmatov supplied a blend of legends and folklore to complement Soviet experience and science fiction, Okeev let the landscape speak to viewers. Through this emphasis of place, Okeev sympathetically revealed traditional culture and its animistic powers to reign over rural life. The first feature film by Okeev, *Sky of Our Childhood* (1967), is a poetic and autobiographical film about a horse breeder in the Kyrgyz mountains. It centers on the conflict between nomadic and urban life. The film is also a memorial to a fading culture.

Okeev: “I want to preserve the memory of the last of our clans. They gave us food and clothing. We often ridicule our old men and boast of our modern ways. But thinking it over,

I am sure there are things we can learn from them. They do not drink, do not smoke, are not mercenary and they never lie.” ... “They seem to belong purely to nature.”

Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, Soviet nationality film turned in some cases to the mystical in the 1960s and 1970s. One path in Sergei Parajanov’s *Sayat Nova* (1969) and another in Ali Khamraev’s *Man Follows Birds* (1975) brought mystical, medieval, color, and abstraction to confront socialist realism. In many ways, this movement, far from officially sanctioned, was an essential part in the self-discovery of Central Asia’s past. This sentiment has become relevant again in recent years.



Debunking the New Wave

Before we can move to Serik Aprymov’s latest film, which draws heavily from the traditions of the 1960s and 1970s, we should briefly consider the impact of the intervening years.

Forrest S. Ciesol argued in 1990 that “everyone loves a good ‘wave’ in filmmaking. It invariably distracts us from the otherwise tenuous state of world cinema. It is unlikely, however, that even the most forward-looking among us would have predicted that the next wave would be from Soviet Kazakstan.”²¹

There seems to be a troubling emphasis on the New Wave for Kazakstan - perhaps we need a new vocabulary for film movements. First there was the “new wave” in the 1950s and 1960s²... then again in the 1980s and 1990s. Every major social and political upheaval is met with a “New Wave” moniker. The “New Wave” was attributed to Kazak films during the 1989 International Film Festival in Moscow. It was initially intended to attract foreign critics to the film movement... and Soviet film critics Aleksandr Shpagin (1990) and Nina Zarkhi (1990) immediately questioned the movement’s connections to cinematic realism. Is it still valid? Or just advertising?

The French New Wave, or *La Nouvelle Vague*, emerged as a film movement in the late-1950s and

1960s in order to elevate the role of the auteur while working within small budgets where friends and family comprised the cast and crew. Technically, these directors used long tracking shots as well as new film technology such as portable cameras that allowed fluid camera movement. Thematically, they dealt with the absurdity of life. Given this overview, there are certain parallels with Kazak films of perestroika and early independence: low costs, improvisation, cinematic realism, and absurdity.

Ludmilla Pruner takes a different tact in her estimation of these new Kazak films: “The cosmopolitan air of the New Wave was the product of the fusion of Asian values with the Russian aspiration toward a western lifestyle.”³ The movement begun in Sergei Solov’ev’s film workshop with Rashid Nugmanov, Serik Aprymov, Ardal Amirkulov, Amanzhol Aituarov, Talgat Temenov, and Darezhan Omirbaev was much more than aspirations of joining western culture.⁴ It was varied, complex, internationalist, and personal.

If we can speak of any uniformity, the movement was pessimistic. Serik Aprymov’s *Last Stop* (1989) described life languishing at the end and at the edges of Soviet life. His hero appears on a quiet Saturday evening with nothing to do. He has just left the Soviet Army and finds his hometown listless and lost. There he observes through a disjointed narrative, the visual experience of village poverty, rampant drunkenness, and a suicide for no apparent reason. Ultimately he must leave to find his life and job somewhere else.

Talgat Temenov’s *The Running Target* (1991) echoes the Alma-Ata uprising with no hope for future and haunted by past. Also pessimistic was Omirbaev’s trilogy: *Kairat* (1991), *Heartbeats* (1995), *Killer* (1998), which features urban settings and displacement. If there was anything positive about the movement, Viktor Tsoi’s fame brought intense interest to Rashid Nugmanov’s *The Needle* (1988) and nine million viewers to Soviet theaters. The journal, *Iskusstvo kino* called it “the best Soviet film released in the first six

months of 1989.” To explain the absence of anti-Soviet sentiment in Kazak film, Baktry Karagulov offered: “Why should we offend them? Of course we lost a little. We can’t make films about how bad the Soviets were. We always had our culture. Why make a film about what does not exist? Thanks to Khrushchev, we have Aitmatov. We don’t need anything artificial.”⁵

Aprymov’s New Turn?

In his previous films, Aprymov evoked disillusionment with his childhood ideal by reproducing his return to a village from which he was increasingly alienated. *Last Stop* resolutely attacked the social norms of village life and especially highlighted the decay of the system of respect for elders. Thirty academics, heroes of Socialist Labor, mother-heroines, and even Aprymov’s high school principle signed a letter protesting this film: “Serik Aprimov distorted the rural reality and peoples’ lifestyle, painting everything in black. He deliberately took pictures of old houses that are falling apart. At the present time we have begun to replace them with new houses....”⁶

Aprymov responded: “If I created a film with the same concept but about the city life of Kazaks, people would agree, they would say: ‘Yes, the city corrupts people.’ But Kazaks developed their holy of holiest places – an *aul* – where their traditions and morals are kept alive.”⁷ He continued: “Our writers always exclaimed in a very theatrical way – *My aul! It is my source of wisdom and intelligence! Of everything!* I ignored this and showed true life.”

In his new film, Aprymov seems to reverse the trend by engaging the trope of the alienation of the city in contrast to the preservation of values in the *aul*. He is particularly sensitive to these polarities: after leaving his native Aksuat at the age of thirteen, Aprymov came to view his own village through the eyes of an outsider. While the village does not necessarily play a positive role in the film, it draws the characters in with its gravitational pull. Urban and nomadic life feed on its vitality and commerce.

Introducing the Film

The film opens with camera angles repeating the aesthetic practices of an American Western: the mounted



hero galloping across Kazak valleys is shown first in long shots, then in profile, and finally in close-up. Accompanied by a Kazak mouth harp, the traditionally pastoral instrument of the Kazaks, the “hunter” is introduced as a typical outsider loved by one woman in town and misunderstood by the rest. The first village scene illustrates a meeting of archetypes – the collectivity of elders, children, and women against the three outcasts – the otherworldly hunter, the fallen woman, and the orphaned child, Erken.

Tension breaks the austerity of the *aul* when the hunter spends the night with Erken’s adoptive mother. The young Erken steals the hunter’s horse and gun, and he takes out his anger by vandalizing the local store with his newly acquired gun. The haplessness of the local police is rendered in caricature with exaggerated sirens and the query: “By the way, do you have enough gas today?” Reflecting the invasiveness of village life and the lack of respect for unmarried women, the police chief walks straight into the house of Erken’s mother to question her about the incident.

In rather simplistic terms, Erken escapes to the mountains rather than attending “reform school” and chooses nature’s liberation over civilization’s constraints. The hunter, who warns “you’ll either head to the hills with me or go to prison,” supports his rejection of society as the film blends images of the mountains and an eagle flying above them with the music of the *dombira*. There is no ambiguity about where the director’s sympathy resides. In the mountains Erken begins his journey to manhood, learning the beauty and power of nature in order to take the place of the hunter when he is ready. Imparting Kazak steppe wisdom through the voice of the hunter that “life exists along the riverbank” and that “the hills are never empty,” Aprymov expands our awareness of life between the stationary *aul* and migrating nomads. Through this, Aprymov evokes the folkloric tale of the *Grey Wolf*, or *Bozkurt*, that bonds Turkic tribes to a common mythical lupine ancestor based in the Altai region. Notably, this is the region to which the hunter traces his own roots. The linking of the hunter to the totemic wolf, his elusive five-toed counterpart, recalls this ancient Turkic wolf-ancestor belief and underlines the pre-Islamic culture of Kazakhstan. In contrast to Tolomush Okeev’s classic, *The Fierce One* (*Liutyi*, 1973), a harshly realistic film about a boy’s relationship with a wolf that he raises from a cub, Aprymov is less interested in the savagery of animals in the clash between man and nature than in

understanding the social interactions between characters from their respective cultural milieus. Nevertheless, both directors express the beauty of the Central Asian mountain landscape and masterfully allow the panorama a significant role in their films.

Film Interlude: “The Hills are Empty”

When Erken and the hunter first sit down and take in the immensity and bounty of nature, Aprymov engages the long-standing cliché of Kazakhstan’s “empty steppe.” Here, we witness a classic post-colonial refutation of empty spaces on a map. In this context, the participation of Abderrahmane Sissako, the French producer for the film and one of the most important film directors in Africa, is intriguing. While Sissako studied at VGIK in Moscow in mid-1980s he certainly formed a bond with the young Kazak directors. His *Waiting for Happiness* (2002) deals with the themes of cultural displacement, exile, and travel that would resonate with Central Asian directors. Erken’s naïveté claims that “the hills are empty,” but Aprymov, through the voice of the sage hunter, corrects this by filling in the visual and aural space with wildlife, music, and a way of life.



Film Interlude: Women and the Symbolic

The portrayal of women in this film reflects a larger deficiency in Central Asian cinema, where directors have chosen to create blank canvasses of gender stereotypes rather than complex characters in their own right. While the mother remains static in a state of lost virtue, which is left entirely unexplored in the film, we see the hunter as a dynamic sexual predator anticipated from the previous scene. Aprymov’s deliberately tantalizing encounter with the rootless modern scientist, who takes measurements in the mountains and sleeps in a Russian-style tent, reinforces the hunter’s Kazak virility while simultaneously referencing the traditional

game *Kyz kuu*, a game of pursuit between the sexes played on horses. The itinerant Kazak hunter conquers the urbane Kazak scientist. Searching for “warmth” that will return meaning to his life, Erken by contrast finds love in the form of another man’s bride. He even sits down in the man’s tent; the husband, unable to chastise him, chooses to sing instead:

Your face aglow
Disturbed my peaceful thoughts
I regret that I met you so late
That I won’t see you forever...

I see the moon in your face
I love you dearly, you are my angel
If only I’d met you before
In my frisky younger days...

Here the husband laments his time lost, as well as his wife’s youth. Through the portrayal of this impotent but virtuous Kazak nomad, Aprymov challenges the vitality of pastoralism and glorifies the hunter who moves freely between the nomadic and the sedentary worlds.

Erken’s eventual and unavoidable clash with society is achieved through his relationship with his stepmother. Having “breathed life” and “achieved warmth” during his six months of freedom with the hunter, Erken must ultimately sacrifice this freedom in order to save his stepmother, who lies near a cold death unless she is returned to the village. His return brings the responsibility that he must go to prison for his earlier transgressions.

Film Interlude: Contrasting City and Steppe

There are no harsher and deliberate contrasts in Kazak film between urban and nomadic spaces than the clips describing Erken’s journey to an urban jail cell and internment. He is processed, numbered, de-humanized. His lupine identity is muzzled like the dog next to him. Even his tongue is restrained since Russian is the language of the city. It is the beginning of his complete alienation, underlined by the montage of the hunter’s freedom. Even when the film jumps several years to Erken’s transformation and return, Aprymov underlines the contrast between the precisely controlled movements of the juvenile prisoners and the free hunter. The only view we have of the Kazak city is this prison.

Film Interlude: Mirroring a Positive Outlook

Time plays a particularly important role in the film. As the story unfolds, time accelerates from one day... to two... then through weeks, months, and finally years. With this movement of time, Aprymov leads the viewer through a contrasting tale of transformation and stasis within the Kazak village. The permanence of nature, the *aul*, the shaman, and social networks are juxtaposed against the evolution of the stepmother, the hunter, and Erken. After half a year of self-exploration and education in the mountains, Erken seeks redemption in his village and submits to his incarceration. And following several more years of being imprisoned in the controlled urban space of a modern penitentiary, and in the end Erken returns to the mountains again to become a hunter in his own right.

Two scenes I show in succession come from the beginning and end of the film. They are in a sense a mirror of each other and offer an image of the positive progression of generational succession. It is a scene taken from everyday life on the Kazak steppe – the encounter of the hunter visiting the yurt of a nomadic family and giving his blessings to their newborn son. While Erken is just an observer to the first interaction, at the end of the film he becomes a hunter in his own right and performs the ritual since the family has a second son to protect. Unlike the Russian literary trope where the father kills the son and thus retards historical progress and evolution, a natural balance is achieved through this succession.

Conclusion: A Link with the Past

If the biting satire and cinema verité of *Last Stop* (1989) were markers of the “Kazak New Wave,” then *The Hunter* indicates a return to earlier cinematic values and national pride evident in the films of the 1960s. Searching for identity in contemporary Kazakhstan, Aprymov’s mentors in this work are clearly Chingiz Aitmatov, Shaken Aimanov, and Tolomush Okeev. Set within the confines of post-Soviet realities, Aprymov suggests the resurrection of ancient Kazak social institutions and the link between the otherworldly and the mundane through characters that exist on the fringes of village life. Ultimately, the desire to comprehend the beauty of nature remains the aspiration of our hero

in Aprymov's cinematic call to the audience to re-think their modern mores and re-engage their past.

This film is *not* national cinema: Omirbaev and Aprymov are self-conscious auteurs, seeking some kind of understanding of Kazakstan's present situation. Moreover, *The Hunter* does not stand as a national allegory, as Frederic Jameson's now infamous essay would have us believe.⁸ Extending the examples of Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman* (1918) and Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* (1975), which are literatures describing their social and historical insecurities with the First World, Jameson interprets all third-world films and literature in the sense of national allegory. Not only does this theory tell us more about the dominance of Eurocentrism than third-world literature, but it also overlooks the degree of reception a text has within its national context.⁹ Kazak filmmakers have yet to demonstrate that their films speak for the Kazak masses.

Although from a Socialist Realist milieu, Shaken Aimanov's *Land of Our Fathers* (1967) follows a similar path of cultural exploration shown in Aprymov's film. Man and grandson set off across Kazakstan, the reality they see is harsh but ultimately they discover a pride and admiration of their people. Aprymov is clearly not ready for this kind of optimism, ideological or not, but the intention is to move from a social critique of nihilism so much a part of Kazak film in the 1990s to filmic representations of Kazak traditional beliefs, culture, and ways of life.

Michael Rouland is a Havighurst Postdoctoral Fellow
at Miami University in Ohio

The Hunter (Kazakstan/Japan/France, 2004)
Color, 93 minutes
Director: Serik Aprymov
Screenplay: Serik Aprymov
Cinematography: Hasan Kidiraliyev, Boris Troshev, and Bolat Syleev
Soundtrack: Ali Ahmadiev and Aliia Mirzacheva
Music: Kazbek Spanov
Art Director: Umirzak Shmanov
Cast: Dogdurbek Kidiraliyev (Erken), Alibek Zhuasbaev (Hunter), Gulnaz Omarova (Mother)

Executive Producer: Gulmira Aprymova,
Executive Producer (France): Abderrahmane Sissako
Director of Production (France): Benoit Joseph Choix
Director of Production (Japan): Ueda Makoto
Production: East Cinema (Kazakstan), Kazakfilm Studio, NHK (Japan), Cinenomad (France)
Funding Sources: French Ministry of Culture, Centre National de la Cinematographie, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MonteCinemaVerite Foundation (Switzerland), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Hubert Balls Fund (Netherlands).

This paper extends an argument first introduced in Michael Rouland, "Film Review: Serik Aprymov's *The Hunter* (2004)," *KinoKultura* (April 2005): <http://www.kinokultura.com/reviews/R4-05okhotnik.html>.

¹ Forrest S. Ciesol, "Kazakstan Wave," *Sight and Sound* 1 (1989/1990): 56

² Especially, Aleksandr Karpov's *A Mother's Epic* (1963), Mazhit Begalin's *Footsteps Disappear on the Horizon* (1965), Shaken Aimanov's *The Land of Our Fathers* (1967), and Abdulla Karsakbaev's *A Troubled Morning* (1968).

³ Pruner 791.

⁴ The workshop created *Belyi golob* (The White Pigeon, 1985) which won a special jury prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1986.

⁵ Gönül Dönmez-Colin, "Central Asia: Redefining its Cultural Roots," on the webpage <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/donm022.htm> (September 15, 2005).

⁶ Forrest S. Ciesol, "Kazakstan Wave," *Sight and Sound* 1 (1989/1990): 57.

⁷ Abikeeva 45, originally *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1990)).

⁸ Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88.

⁹ See Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 3-25 and Imre Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 3 (2001): 803-827.

Modes of Contemporary Central Asian Culture

Conference Summary

Anaita Khudonazar, Ph.D. candidate in the department of Near Eastern Studies at Berkeley, began with “Women in Early Uzbek Film.” She explained that very early Uzbek films made by Russian filmmakers with Russian actresses and screenwriters targeted Russian and European audiences, portraying Muslim women of Uzbekistan as either dangerous sirens or innocent natives. All in all, veiled women were symbols of an oppressed and backward culture. This changed in the mid-1920’s when films began to address a Central Asian audience divided by gender. Films geared toward a male audience reassured Uzbeks of women in traditional roles, as long as they cooperated with the Soviet system. Gender relations remained patriarchal in these action adventures, with passive female characters wearing traditional dress, and whose physical location in the films never strayed from home or garden. *Jenotdel* films, by contrast, were geared towards women and emphasized female oppression. For example, female characters who reached out for help from Soviet comrades were saved from their abusive husbands; empowered Uzbek women married progressive Uzbek men; or when a woman went to work in a Soviet factory, it provided the emancipated woman with money, health, and child care, and in essence was a replacement for an Uzbek man. This creation of conflict between men and women was used to undermine and culturally penetrate the traditional Uzbek family structure. Although these films tried to modernize gender relations, in the end they in fact reinforced Orientalist notions of woman as prize.

Seth Graham, humanities fellow in the department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford University, spoke on “Second Cinema? The Legacies of Soviet Film in Central Asia Since Independence.” He stated that Central Asian cinema since the end of the Soviet era



has been involved in an ongoing search for both a usable past and a viable film industry. “Second Cinema,” meaning *auteur* cinema, not only refers to the former Second World, but also the space in between “First Cinema” (large scale Hollywood productions) and “Third Cinema” (post-colonialization). He showed the Kyrgyz short film, “The Fly Up” (Marat Sarulu, 2001). A young man leaves his factory job for home at the end of the work day. Restless, he gets on a bicycle and considers several choices before he heads for a cliff where he takes off on a hang glider. While it is a postcolonial film, engaging nation

and history, it does not overpoliticize, nor does it lose sight of cinematic, artistic expression. The film is essentially about vectors, where the most crucial vector is up, and includes many images of flight. Another prominent vector is the return from the factory (urban) to the village (rural), the opposite of most Soviet films. There are several references to fellow Kyrgyz director Aktan Abdykalykov, placing the film in a contemporary space. A second symbolic field is revealed if we interpret the hero to be the director, the artist. This also makes the film a sort of *Kunstlerfilm* in miniature—the artist literally rejects many paths, moving from thought, pondering, and contemplating to actually committing the creative act.

Michael Rouland, postdoctoral fellow at the Havighurst Center, Miami University presented “Beyond the New Wave: The Return to Folklore in Serik Aprymov’s *The Hunter*.” The new Kazakh film *The Hunter* (2004) is a return to earlier cinematic values and national pride evident in the films of the 1960’s. His paper is included in its entirety in this newsletter.

Alma Kunanbaeva, visiting professor at Stanford University, spoke on “The Modern Ethnic Voices of Central Asian Music.” She explained that while

modern Central Asian music often modernizes epic traditions, there is at the same time a desire to maintain “authenticity.” Two specific events led to a deeper understanding of this ongoing process.

The first Voices of Asia Pop Festival was held in 1991 in Kazakhstan, and focused on an interest in breaking into mass media. One artist used a variety of non-traditional instruments with a very modern, pop sound. Another artist focused on ethnic identity, political affiliation without corrupt Soviet politics, and spirituality without religion. This was folk poetry, re-introduced on a different semantic level.

The first Turkic People’s Festival of Folk Music was held in 1996, also in Kazakhstan in conjunction with the 5th International Albert Bates Lord conference and the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the outstanding folk singer aqyn Jambul Jabayev. (“Aqyn” is a tribal poet/bard.) This festival focused on traditional folk music. Throat singers were the favorite, with their connection to shamans, mountains, and all things archaic. It was hoped that interest in this style would bring to fruition authentic folk preservation and promotion.

In her conclusion, she explained that within Central Asian modern music culture there exists simultaneously: 1) the revival of “authenticity”: traditional art, geared toward people who know the language, poetry, and anthropology of Central Asian people; 2) the creation of “authenticity”: artistic music, geared toward reaching the core of ethnic identity; and 3) the borrowing of “authenticity”: a commercial culture, including world music, jazz, and pop.

Izaly Zemtsovsky, visiting scholar at the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies at Berkeley, concluded the first day of the conference with “Central Asian Ethnomusicology in the Frame of Multilayered Modern Context.” He explained that modern ethnomusicological thought in Central Asia is developing in the frame of four essential and practically interconnected intellectual contexts. The first one is marked by previous Central Asian traditions of music-study (old treatises included); another follows the Russian scholarly tradition (for example, folklore and the composer subject); and the third is New Age musicology, which concerns itself with adapting to American and Western European academic traditions, both modern and postmodern. The fourth one, however, is especially remarkable—it is practically dedicated to

the new history of national music, sometimes even a mythological history, and could be called the invention of a totally new and exceptional branch of learning. Central Asian ethnomusicologists hardly study so-called world music, as they consider their own music a whole spiritual world in itself. They examine Central Asian music as an inalienable part of the world artistic process, not limited, as before, exclusively within the context of Russian culture. The mixture of these four traditions is so remarkable that it can be seen as a peculiar feature of the modern stage of Central Asian scholarship in general.

Ts. Uranchimeg, Ph.D. candidate in the department of the History of Art, opened the second day of the conference with “The Modern Art of Mongolia.” She expressed that such a fast change to “professional” art and a tantalizing passion to be an artist shared by self- or locally trained people in Mongolia in the mid twentieth century is a shocking phenomenon, especially in the context of a strong Buddhist culture where monks have been the main image-makers. A seemingly smooth transformation of a pious society into a complex culture with increasingly European influence transmitted through a Russian “window,” is an intriguing issue that is reflected in Mongolian art of the twentieth century. Soviet art teachers educated the first “professional” artists of Mongolia, teaching them the basics of oil painting, canvas treatment and the conventions of European-style representation. Although historically Mongolia had close ties with its southern neighbour, China, there has been no cultural contact between the two countries since the 1930s due to the complete border shut-off. Mongolia’s inclusion into the socialist block with the Soviet Union as an “older brother” brought the country into a close affiliation with Eastern Europe. The majority of Mongolian artists were educated in Moscow, Leningrad and in Eastern European countries. However, she argued, it is overly simplistic just to observe the influence of European masters in Mongolian art. Rather, it is the vibrant Mongolian history and nomadic sensibility which creates a specific perception of space and color, and the internal dynamics of the rapidly transforming society that one must consider in the interpretation of stunningly bright and vivid Mongolian art of the twentieth century.

Kazakh: Paintings by Saule Suleimenova

September 14 - October 20, 2005

Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities



Saule framing her paintings



Visitors at the Kazakh exhibit



Saule, *right*, and the art installer days before the opening



Saule on opening night



Kazakh Cancan (Astana), 2005



BPS Executive Director Dr. Edward Walker, *center*, with students



Saule discusses the exhibit with a guest



ISEEES staff members Andrée Kirk, *left*, and Stella Bourgoïn

Modern Visions from Mongolia

October 4 - 14, 2005

Worth Ryder Gallery



Left to right: Artists J. Munkhtsetseg and M. Erdenebayar with guest



Artist Tugs-Oyun, left, with guest



Executive Directors: Dr. Sanjyot Mehendale, CCAsP, left, and Dr. Barbara Voytek, ISEES



Opening night at the *Modern Visions from Mongolia* exhibit



Left to right: Connie Hwang, Stella Bourgoin, and Andrée Kirk



Artist M. Erdenebayar, left, with friends.



Guests at the opening reception mingle in front of M. Erdenebayar's painting *Nine Portraits of Horses*, 2005



Exhibit organizer Ts. Uranchimeg, right, with gallery visitor

The first Mongolian exhibition at UC Berkeley, *Modern Visions from Mongolia*, showcased works by three modern Mongolian artists S. Tugs-Oyun, M. Erdenebayar, and J. Munkhtsetseg. If Tugs-Oyun represents a generation of Mongolian artists who were trained in Moscow and were particularly active in the time of "socialist-realism," thus raising the issue of censorship and productivity in the Soviet era, Erdenebayar and Munkhtsetseg are well-established contemporary artists, who were locally trained and wholeheartedly live on art. In my presentation, I have attempted to analyze the issues of subject matter, sources for motifs and changes of style in the works of these three distinctly different artists who demonstrate the vibrant and complex art scene of modern Mongolia. The totalizing view of Mongolia as a remote, cold country and the Mongols as barbarian warriors is shamefully still extant in popular image and even in some scholarship. The dynamic composition, and sharp juxtaposition of "flaming" colors, as well as the themes and motifs apparent in the works of these artists, I suggest, are all indicative of the duality of the modern Mongolian society, where urban culture and nomadism remarkably coexist, and constitute together the complex notion of what is "modernity" in contemporary Mongolia.

-- Ts. Uranchimeg, graduate student, History of Art Department, U.C. Berkeley

University of California, Berkeley
Caucasus and Central Asia Program
260 Stephens Hall #2304
Berkeley, CA 94720-2304

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