JEANS STORIES: CONSUMPTION OF WESTERN GOODS IN SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN DURING THE BREZHNEV ERA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in

Eurasian Studies

at

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY - SCHOOL OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

2023

THESIS APPROVAL FORM
NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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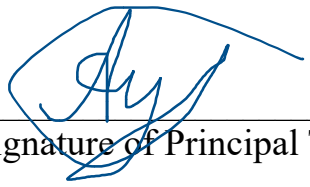
The 1st of June, 2023



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Abstract

Jeans are often seen as one of the most iconic symbols representing the Westernization and growing consumerism of Soviet society during late socialism. While the existing studies on the role of Western culture's consumption in the Soviet context have problematized this understanding, they focused primarily on the metropolitan or Western regions of the Soviet Union. The present thesis aims to fill in this research gap by adding a republican perspective from Soviet Kazakhstan. Using jeans as an object of analysis, this paper explores local practices of Western goods consumption and its meanings in relation to the global, Soviet, and local culture contexts. Based on the content analysis of local periodicals, Republican Communist Party archival data, memoirs and interviews, this thesis argues several things. Firstly, the influence of Western culture on local society was quite limited, much of it due to the provincial position of Soviet Kazakhstan in terms of geographical remoteness from the 'West', and its lower position within the hierarchy of the Soviet system of distribution. Secondly, instead of restricting the appeal of jeans to their Western identity, this research points out the Soviet-informed use and locally embedded value ascribed to jeans, which suggests not the Westernization, but rather, cultural hybridization of late Soviet society.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is a product of so many people, who generously shared their time and knowledge with me. First of all, I would like to thank my thesis advisers at Nazarbayev University - Professor Mikhail Akulov and Professor Alima Bissenova, my external reader, Professor Sergey Zhuk from Ball State University, and our Program Director Professor Tsyrempilov. Each of them offered valuable perspective and comments on my thesis, which helped me see the academic work in a more in-depth way. I want to express my deep gratitude to Professor Akulov for being such a supportive, intellectually curious and philosophical adviser, the experience of working with you was truly transformative for me.

Writing this thesis along with my classmates and sharing our pains and hopes helped me to stay on track and remain human, thank you for that! My yoga community was another pillar of perseverance and warmth during this journey, thank you, our dearest Ahimsa Hearts, for all your love and understanding. I would also like to extend gratitude to the respondents of this project, archivists, and library specialists, who helped me with gathering the stories and information that I needed.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My mother Alma, the most courageous human being I have met so far, for her funny life stories that she often shares over dinner, when the whole family is gathered together. These stories, in addition to creating the sense of being at home, inspired my curiosity about the everyday life history of Soviet people. Last but not least, I want to thank my amazing husband Bakhytzhan. No words can express how grateful I am for your endless support and understanding. Thank you for listening and being there for me in days and nights of writing struggles, love you!

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Introduction

The history of the late Soviet Union under Brezhnev, often referred to as the period of 'stagnation', remains an understudied area of academic research, with scholarship on the Soviet periphery being even more scarce. The present study works towards filling in this gap by analyzing consumer culture in late Soviet Kazakhstan and using this framework in order to gain insights into the history of everyday life at the Soviet periphery during the late 1960s – mid 1980s. As Natalya Chernyshova (2013) points out, despite the common narrative of Soviet consumer being the victim of 'shortage' economy, the consumption scene by the time of Brezhnev's rule demonstrated a more complex picture of consumer agency. Placed within the official discourse of 'developed socialism' with the growing orientation towards the welfare state model (Rutland & Smolkin-Rothrock, 2014), the Soviet consumer was becoming more selective and demanding in his/her choices of goods (Chernyshova, 2013), while also being increasingly exposed to the materiality and popular culture coming from outside of the USSR.

Research on the history of consumption in the late Soviet Union, as well as the wider studies on the socio-cultural history of this period demonstrate the usefulness of this framework, with consumption practices serving as a point of intersection for a number of critical aspects of Soviet life. More specifically, these 'junction' points that the study of consumer culture and materiality can provide include the analysis of relationship between the (1) state and society in terms of the official ideological frameworks, challenges, conformation, or indifference to them; (2) intra-social level of analysis in relation to the informal networks and systems of values and behavior developed between the individuals within the Soviet society; (3) international/global and local Soviet/national cultures in terms of questions of identity, popular culture, etc. This research will analyze the culture of wearing jeans in late Soviet Kazakhstan to explore the social and cultural

implications of this ‘meeting’ - how the presence of this product of Western culture can inform our understanding of local society in relation to ‘national’, ‘Soviet’ and ‘global’ culture frameworks. In this way, the present research aims to address the gaps in the existing scholarship on the history of consumer culture in Soviet Asian republics, as well as the lack of research on the history of Soviet Kazakhstan during late socialism.

Literature overview:

The research on consumer culture during late socialism characterizes the recent scholarship approaches to the study of Brezhnev’s period. Challenging the oft-used narrative of ‘stagnation’, these scholars question the generalized negative interpretation of this period, according to which the Soviet society was a victim of poor planning and administration, inefficient economy of constant shortages, the disillusionment and low interest in the Soviet socialist ideology (Fainberg & Kalinovsky, 2016). By problematizing this discourse as the product of politicized Gorbachev’s perestroika rhetoric, researchers suggest to direct the attention instead to the wider perspective of this period’s complexity, reflected in the socio-cultural life of Soviet citizens and their agency.

In their works, Natalya Chernyshova (2016) and Anna Ivanova (2018), for example analyze how the official discourse of ‘developed socialism’ and state-established institutions, such as special chain of shops Berezki, created the conditions for the proliferation of consumer culture among Soviet citizens, and to the pressures on the state that came as a by-product of this ‘consumption’ window. In Chernyshova’s analysis (2016), she emphasizes the importance of considering the factor of consumer agency normalization during late socialism, whereby the state itself legitimized the consumer’s selective and demanding behavior, as the provision of good living standards became the major part of Soviet official discourse. Ivanova’s (2018) research also deals with material consumption, but she focuses more on the destabilizing effect that the paradox of

conspicuous consumption had on the Soviet society's perception of the state. Analyzing the phenomenon of Berezki shops, Ivanova opens an important discussion on both objective and subjective status inequalities in Soviet society of Brezhnev's era. What she observes is that the 'normalization' of these shops' presence in the consciousness of the Soviet people, yet at the same time their exclusiveness resulted in both fascination and the ideological critique responses from ordinary citizens.

The consumer culture in the late Soviet Union is often studied through the relationship between the Soviet identity and the products of Western culture. Discussing the issue of Soviet people's consumption of Western material and cultural goods, Yurchak (2006) suggests that the two could co-exist without necessarily implying the subversive effect of Western goods on Soviet people's identity. The ambiguous position of the authorities in representing the use of Western products allowed for contextualized individual interpretation of engaging with the Western material culture. Portraying the ordinary Soviet person's attitude towards consumption, Yurchak (2006) points out the concept of 'cultured consumption'. Average Soviet consumer, according to him, was conditioned by the state discourse on 'culturedness', that translated into the idea of moderate consumption. The use of Western products, thus, could be tolerated if it did not constitute a purely materialistic mindset, but was primarily aimed at the individual's personal spiritual growth (Chernyshova, 2013).

Yurchak's important contribution to the issue of 'import' consumption also comes through his symbolic conceptualization of "Imaginary West", where the consumption of jeans, for example, could be seen as a non-ideological attempt to connect with alternative reality within the context of enclosed Soviet existence. While Yurchak's work offers a useful framework for understanding the complexities of late Soviet society, his work also attracted criticism due to the

limited representativeness of his research sample that focuses on the metropolitan cities of the Soviet Union (Zhuk, 2010). Zhuk's book on the history of rock and roll in the Ukrainian closed city Dniepropetrovsk considers the impact that the Soviet Ukrainians' consumption of Western cultural products had on the local people's perception of what constitutes modern. According to him, the growing popularity of Western rock and adventure literature among the population of this city resulted in the gradual Russification of the city's population, as the main source for delivering these Western products came from Soviet Russian metropole (Zhuk, 2010). Zhuk's research serves an important role in problematizing the possibility of creating a general picture of Brezhnev's period by adding a look from the periphery.

Another group of literature on the subject of consumer culture during late socialism can be characterized by its specific approach of exploring this subject through the agency of things, and the social realities produced through their interaction with Soviet people. Research conducted by Golubev (2020) and Lebina (2019) offer a valuable set of methodological approaches in how the historian can choose to conceptualize the history of Soviet consumer culture. These researchers share the approach of treating consumption as a part of materiality of people's lives, whereby one can see the organic unfolding of consumer culture's development in the context of everyday life reality. Exploring the agency of the material object in the form of the TV set, for instance, Golubev delves into the study of materiality by analyzing how the proliferation of TV use affected the understanding and practices of such notions as leisure, health, and sexuality, interior design and its exhibitionary symbolic value of modernity, etc. (Golubev, 2020, pp. 149, 153). Tracing the life of objects, such as fur coats, hats, TVs, various electrical appliances in their historical transformation, Lebina tells the stories of these objects, how some of them became a marker of social status and trendiness (fur coats and hats), while others created new environments and

realities of everyday life, including such anecdotal situations as the wedding wish-list that asked for no electrical coffee makers that were mass produced but proved to be inefficient in practice (Lebina, 2019, pp.463-464). Adding a material dimension to the micro-history of consumer culture, this approach allows for a fresh outlook on the history of Soviet society through a contextualized and not strictly ideologically-driven analysis.

Theory & Methodology

Drawing inspiration from the material culture studies, this thesis employs an object-based analysis approach to explore the dynamics of identity and social change in Soviet Kazakhstan of late socialism. As Igor Kopytoff notes in his essay on the commoditization of things, "biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure" (1986, p. 67). Referring to the adaptability of objects to specific cultural and social conditions, he suggests that "[…] what is significant about the adoption of alien objects – as of alien ideas – is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use (1986, p.67). In other words, by considering the life of an object within a specific community, that is, how it was purchased, the ways of its usage, who owned and used it, and therefore, the value and meaning of this object, one can learn more about the culture and structure of this society. The approach of material studies, and in particular, the social and cultural biography of things, focuses on the process of usage, which allows one to peer into the fabrics of everyday life from an interactive angle. In his book "The Practice of Everyday Life" Michel de Certeau (1984) demonstrates the importance of exploring consumption through the practices of 'usage' in order to understand the operative meanings of cultural phenomena. Thus, according to him, instead of treating society-consumer as a passive in-taker of products, one can analyze its tactical agency in what he calls 'bricolage' or inventiveness of adapting the products of disciplining according to their needs. Such framework

allows for a more nuanced and multilateral perspective on the questions of identity and the structures of everyday life.

While this research does not aim to be representative of Soviet Kazakhstan's society at large, it does find value in using the approach informed by the material studies and cultural biography of things to understand the more localized meanings of the Soviet people's interaction with products of Western culture. Jeans, being an 'alien', and more specifically, 'Western' object, due to its popular culture and production origins association, can thus serve as a lens or 'litmus paper' (Chernyshova, 2013) for exploring the details of everyday life in late Soviet Kazakhstan, and how the members of its society perceived themselves in relation to local, Soviet, and Western/global culture. In order to explore the questions of identity and everyday life through the lens of material consumption as a form of practice, this research considered the interplay of 3 actors: the Soviet state and consumer formed the major focus of the analysis, with jeans as the third actor, representing a material object, and itself a form of agency. Research methods consisted of content analysis of secondary sources and thematic analysis of interviews. The source base includes archival data, periodicals, published sources, memoirs, and interviews.

First of all, exploring the attitude of the state towards consumption of Western culture's products, including jeans, I referred to the State Archive of Astana city and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, located in Almaty. I have tried to find information on jeans in the funds related to trade, Komsomol, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, as well as some archival collections of personal funds. Within these, some of the most valuable information came from materials related to tourism, the protocols of Communist Party sessions, and letters and complaints of the working people. While in general, it was not easy to locate information about jeans and consumption of Western culture more broadly, I found materials on tourism to be

particularly useful in getting a glimpse into the dynamics of relationship between the local, Soviet Kazakhstan context and 'abroad'. More specifically, issues related to the behavior of local tourists abroad and their involvement in speculative activity, as well as the agency of foreign tourists in Almaty (the then capital of KazSSR) were informative in painting the picture of official surveillance and concerns over communications with foreigners, the image of the Soviet citizen/tourist, as well as the agency of the Soviet Kazakhstan's citizens themselves. Information from private letters and complaints, in turn, represented a curious source revealing the public voices of discontent about the growing instances of corruption, favoritism, material machinations and offenses. Particularly striking was how detailed those letters were in renumerating and naming the things that were part of such status-based crimes, with one of the letters detailing such unwarrantedly acquired objects as "refrigerator ZIL Moscow, photo camera Kiev, 3 burner gas stove with 2 gas bottles, etc. And how many sheep were delivered to him for free" (APP, f. 708, op. 56, d. 184, p.28).

Another type of sources that I used for investigating the public discourse on consumption in general, and the consumption of Western goods more specifically, included local newspaper *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* and the republican satirical journal *Shmel'*. These periodicals offered materials covering themes related to the propagandistic representation of the West and its 'rottedness', moral and material decay, crime stories of thingism (*veshchizm*) and its consequences in Soviet society, letters/complaints to the press about the state of consumption, service sector, and youth behavior, as well as the praises-advertisements of consumer goods production in the socialist block. It should be noted that these sources represent information written in the Russian language, however, in the case of journal *Shmel'*, I also checked its Kazakh-language version *Ara*, and it contained the same material as the Russian one.

Contemporary scholarly and methodological literature on the issue of Soviet and global youth culture, as well as fashion also offered perspective on how Soviet specialists addressed the problem of global popular culture and trends spreading into the Soviet Union and affecting its youth in potentially subversive ways. These sources demonstrated the prevalence of 'scientific' objective approach in framing the reasons for youth behavior and fashion choices. Thus, even though the idea of interest in fashion and one's appearance was 'legitimized', these experts still promoted the didactic line of 'modest' and 'tasteful' consumption of Soviet youth.

In order to obtain perspective from below, I used two types of sources: memoirs and interviews. Arsen Bayanov's and Bektas Akhmetov's autobiographical works "*Alma Ata Nefromalnaya*" and "*Chm66 ili million let posle zatmeniya solntsa*" respectively, offered an illustrative and lively source on the everyday life and the culture of youth in Soviet Kazakhstan's capital city Alma Ata. Bayanov's book focuses on Brezhnev's period, while Akhmetov's account is more chronologically stretched and also includes his childhood years during Khrushchev's rule. Both of these texts, however, represent the lives of a rather narrow circle of privileged or 'subculture' members of Soviet Alma Ata. Another analytical limit to these sources is their memoirist style, which implies a retrospective representation and interpretation of past events.

Finally, one of my major sources for distilling personal meanings of jeans consumption were interviews. Overall, I conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with 5 women and 4 men, using a snowball sampling method. The respondents were born in the years ranging from 1952 to 1969, and came from diverse parts of Soviet Kazakhstan: Karaganda, Ekibastuz, Alma Ata, Tselinograd, and Kyzylorda. While this is a limited sample and does not aim to be generalizable of the late Soviet Kazakhstan's society at large, the interviewees do represent different regions, such as smaller cities in the North (predominantly Russian-speaking) and South (predominantly Kazakh-

speaking), industrial and regional centers, and the capital city Alma Ata. The respondents had various backgrounds, some of them being high school and university students during the period under discussion, while others worked in the spheres of medicine, engineering, and trade. One of the limitations of this study was the overwhelming use of Russian language during the interviews, though some informants occasionally used Kazakh language as well. Conducting some interviews in Kazakh potentially could have been more beneficial in gaining a more detailed account in the case of Kazakh language speakers.

Table 1. List of conducted interviews.

Name [Pseudonym]	**Year of Birth**	**Place of living during the Soviet period [Soviet toponyms]**
Sultan Galiyev	1953	Kyzylorda; Baikonur
Raikhan Kaliyeva	1954	Ekibastuz; district center (rural area)
Svetlana Ivanova	1969	Karaganda
Yakov Geller	1968	Karaganda
Ayim Baikenova	1960	Alma Ata
Aliya Kassymova	1958	Tselinograd
Bolat Shaimerdin	1964	Karaganda
Saken Abenov	1951	Alma Ata
Sholpan Tulepova	1969	Karaganda

The duration of interviews was around 45 minutes to 1 hour. The respondents were provided with informed consent, and I notified them that they could stop the interview at any time.

In accordance with ethical principles, the interviews were anonymized. Interview questions were constructed around the themes of access to jeans, their general presence in the local community, the reasons for and meanings of jeans consumption, the role of Western culture in their lives, etc. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by me. The data was manually coded and analyzed thematically based on the analysis of existing scholarly literature.

Structural organization

In order to explore the meanings of jeans consumption within the context of late Soviet Kazakhstan, this thesis considers state discourse on consumption and the 'West', as well as social and individual practices and perceptions of these subjects in everyday life. Starting with the analysis of continuities and ruptures in Soviet official discourse on consumer culture, Chapter 1 provides an overview of 'socialist' consumption frameworks between Stalin's turn to 'cultured' consumption and Brezhnev regime's emphasis on 'Soviet mode of life'. Chapter 2 proceeds with a more specific focus on the dimension of Western-informed model of Soviet modernization, examining its impact on the consumer policies – the challenges that such Western-oriented idea of development produced in relation to the 'uniqueness' of the Soviet project, and the ideological ambiguities of Western consumption that became characteristic of late Soviet society. Finally, Chapter 3 zooms into an object-based analysis by delving into the issue of personal practices and interpretations of Western consumption using of jeans culture in late Soviet Kazakhstan as an example. It traces the ways in which local people explained their desire for jeans, and how this desire correlated with their 'Soviet' identity.

Chapter 1: Consumer culture during the Brezhnev era: negotiating desire and morality

In one of the scenes from Eldar Ryazanov's 1983 Soviet film "Station for Two" (*Vokzal na dvoikh*), the main hero Platon Sergeyevich, a pianist from Moscow, melancholically shares his family difficulties with a casual acquaintance Vera, a Zastupinsk train station cafe waitress. Disillusioned in the materialistic values that came to dominate his family relationships, Platon recounts how rarely he sees his wife, and that all his daughter is interested about is "jeans, disks, and Marlboro". The film's social commentary on the existence of individualistic and consumerist lifestyle in Soviet society usefully encapsulates the aim of the first chapter of this thesis. It focuses on exploring what it meant to be a Soviet consumer in late socialism - the discourses that shaped its formation and how it came to be in reality.

In order to trace the formation of the Soviet consumer, both its 'ideal' and 'subversive' types, this chapter offers a chronological overview of state policies on consumption, the latter's position in relation to the Soviet socialist project, as well as the public and authoritative discourses on the issue of 'proper' consumer behavior. It begins by outlining the critical change in Soviet official rhetoric on the meanings and functions of consumption instigated by Stalin in the mid-1930s. Stalin's move to include consumption and material abundance in the ideological roadmap of the Soviet 'utopia' and its conceptualization in many ways laid the foundation for the understanding of socialist consumption that continued well into the late Soviet period under Brezhnev. The consistency in authorities' paternalistic aspirations to instruct the Soviet people how to 'properly' engage with materiality and thus act as 'cultured' consumers, as the latter part of this chapter demonstrates, became increasingly problematic, since the 'student', i.e. the Soviet consumer itself, grew more sophisticated and demanding in one's desires.

Consumer culture under construction: objects as pathways to modernity

One of the primary references when discussing consumer culture in the Soviet context is the idea of 'cultured' consumption. In her research on the history of Soviet trade, Julie Hessler (2004) points out how Stalin's speech at the 1935 All-Union Congress of Stakhanovites marked a shift in the ideological and visual representation of materiality – abundance became authoritatively legitimized. Elaborating on the theoretical nuances of socialism and communism, Stalin made an explicit move from ascetic values of consumption rhetoric: "In point of fact, Socialism can succeed only on the basis of a high productivity of labour, higher than under capitalism, on the basis of an abundance of products and of articles of consumption of all kinds, on the basis of a prosperous and cultured life for all members of society" (Stalin, 1935). The promises of abundance contained in Stalin's message indicated the potential attainment of material comforts by many – as long as these people pledged to be productive and culturally developed members of Soviet society. Under Stalin's rule, this prosperity and abundance, however, were to be allocated only to certain groups, and Stakhanovite workers and peasants were one of those few. As part of reward for their heroic record productivity, they received privileged access in different areas of life, such as housing, leisure activities, food ratios, etc. (Fitzpatrick, 2000), as well as specific types of material objects. These episodes of Stakhanovites receiving samovars, gramophones, books, and a variety of other 'sophisticated' objects, Sheila Fitzpatrick (2000, p.270) suggests, were not simply meant as a reward of use value, but more so, served as tools for fostering 'culturedness' among non-intelligentsia parts of Soviet society. Their publicly elitist and exemplary position in Soviet society, in turn, was used to demonstrate to the rest of the population what prosperity means in terms of specific consumer goods and one's behavior in relation to them. Such advertisement of consumption through the selected group of Stakhanovites, however, did not always have the

anticipated encouraging effect on other workers, who continued experiencing the reality of shortages in their everyday lives, and instead exhibited hostility towards 'model' workers.

In a similar line of consumption's didactic purposes, Julie Hessler demonstrates how material objects, but also the idea of trade itself became a part of the state's civilizing mission. Mid-1930s and early 1950s, according to her, were the periods when images of material abundance and aesthetics in a sort of commodity fetishist became promoted through press advertisements, trade exhibitions, and model stores (Hessler, 2004). Echoing Elena Osokina's (2001) observations on the hierarchy of Soviet consumption in the 1930s, 'cultured' consumption was also subject to differentiation. The education of the average Soviet person on the importance of how to behave in the shops, how and why to choose proper things and apply them, was supposed to be a top-down process. As such it was the privileged 'industrial' groups of Soviet society, such as engineers, Stakhanovites, and industrial managers (Hessler, 2004), whose exhibitionary consumption of 'modern' goods meant to educate and stimulate the rest of Soviet citizens. The pleasures of consumption, thus, were reframed from its previous association with bourgeois materialism to a new Soviet identity – a culturally developed citizen, who can discern and appreciate the value of civilized lifestyle.

Stalin's 'model' consumption of abundance and luxury for the few, in turn, became a subject of heavy criticism and reform in the aftermath of his death and Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign 'against excesses'. Consumption in Khrushchev regime's vision was supposed to become more 'democratic' and therefore accessible for the general population, guided by the principles of rationality and technological modernity. The socially-oriented ethos of the new ideology, stated in 1961 Party Program proclaimed the 'around the corner' achievement of communism, the rise of economic production and the subsequent provision of living standards

higher than those in the US (Titov 2009, p. 10-12). Consumption, and the consumer him/herself, according to this ideological framework, thus, became an object for Cold War competition, serving as an advertisement for the comparative benefits provided by the Soviet-led communist system over the unsustainable and self-interested capitalist system of the 'West'. The sphere of mass housing construction campaign is probably one of the most iconic examples of Khrushchev's democratization of consumption. Aimed at dealing with the issue of growing urbanization and housing shortages, the government opted for the construction of standardized rapidly assembled apartment buildings, which allowed 108 million Soviet people to live in their 'individual' spaces (Taubman, 2006, p. 280). Consumer culture, in this way, transformed from Stalin's exclusivist and future utopian model, to a more inclusive one. Even such traditionally neglected and marginalized area as the countryside, was supposed to gain from this leveling approach, as one of the ideological slogans of that period indicated: "Erase the difference between city and village!" (Khrushchev, 2010).

Following the mass housing construction campaign, material objects of domesticity acquired particular importance. Just like in the preceding period under Stalin, ideology aimed to instruct the aesthetics of consumer tastes, which now, however, were guided by the necessity of form reflecting the values of functionality, frugality and technological progress (Gerchuk, 2000). The newly built apartments and their residents, therefore, were not supposed to hold on to the Stalinist aesthetic legacy of their past home interior. Under Khrushchev's rule, the old 'cultured' consumption framework of what some researchers term 'bourgeois' vision of materiality transformed into a rational form and content of materiality. Through the interaction with new objects, that had "simple, strict lines, the harmonious combination of colours and forms" (Odintsova, 1961, p. 51), the Soviet consumer him/herself was expected to learn from this

experience and consequently project the values and behavior guided by rationality, authenticity, modesty, and progressive discernment about utilitarian, and not status value of things. Status, however, arguably, continued to stay relevant in the perception of Soviet consumers, for whom the adoption of new and still not widely available technology, could signify their existing status of the vanguards of modernity, as well as belonging to the new Soviet modernizing world (Reid, 2013).

Research in the areas of domestic appliances (Reid & Crowley, 2000) and clothes (Zakharova, 2013) similarly points out the didactic role of the authorities in shaping and instructing the Soviet consumers' experience. A notable change in what otherwise seems like a continuation of Stalinist top-down instrumentalist approach to consumption was Khrushchev regime's reliance on the compartmentalization of research expertise on consumer experience. As such, the 'innovative' use of designers in advising on the issues of form and modernity, often in consultation with foreign fashion specialists, reflected the regime's interest in improving the aesthetic experience of Soviet consumers. Larissa Zakharova offers an amusing example conveying the fashion authorities' attempts to interpret and guide the phenomenon of dynamic fashion changes in relation to the Soviet consumer: "Changing from year to year, fashion reflects the successes of our textile, leather goods, and chemical industries as well as people's tastes and their natural aspiration to update their clothes. In the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, fashion follows a more logical progression than in capitalist countries, where the principle of competition reigns" (Zakharova, 2013, 404). These 'modernizing' attempts, however, did not have an immediate substantial effect, as the consumer sector continued to suffer from lack of supply and outdated goods.

Looking at the concept of consumer culture in these two periods, it can be seen that even though the form of 'culturedness' was subject to ideological and aesthetic changes, the underlying meaning and mechanics of this idea was consistent. Material objects were meant to educate the Soviet people, where the consumption of proper things opened them a window into becoming a part of Soviet cultural development and modernity. Both for Stalin and Khrushchev's regimes, the state and its vanguard models played the role of social advertising of consumer culture that was expected to be emulated by regular citizens.

Developed socialism – consumer culture from below?

Brezhnev's regime followed Khrushchev's consumer-oriented policies of material abundance for everyone, but it faced a significant challenge due to the economic problems inherited from the previous regime. While Khrushchev made promises about the rapid achievement of full communism by 1980, the implementation of these plans, especially in regards to the provision of abundant material conditions for the Soviet people, did not unfold at a promised rate. The production of consumer goods sector (Group B) remained hugely disproportional to heavy industries that continued to receive major investments. According to Zhuldyzbek Abilkozhin (2019, 121) in 1970, for example, the consumer goods sector still comprised only 26,7% of Soviet Kazakhstan's total production output. In 1971 Brezhnev announced his version of the Soviet Union's course of development. In contrast to Khrushchev's 'express' communism, theses on 'developed socialism' rested on the idea of social transformation through gradual change, with particular emphasis drawn to the marking of the USSR's already attained advanced stage of material, technological, and social development. Even though the authorities continued promoting the importance of scientific and technological progress in building the way towards the communist future, the competitive character of these categories seems to have receded in its 'urgency' and

priority (Bacon & Sandle 2002, p.170). The adoption of a paced, methodical and scientific approach to modernization became prevalent. This in a way reflected the existing economic problems that the state aimed to resolve through the use of experts' knowledge and research.

In addition to the material shortage, the paradoxical and more alarming problem of the consumer sector was the phenomenon of accumulating stocks of unpurchased Soviet products. Chernyshova (2013) references an article from central newspaper Pravda from 1964 pointing out the discrepancy between the supply and demand of Soviet consumer goods: "the retail network had accumulated over 2.1 billion roubles' worth of unsold goods above the expected norm, including 1.6 billion worth of ready-made garments, textiles and footwear" (p. 21). Similar concerns were expressed in *Tselnogradskaya Pradva*, a local newspaper in the Soviet Kazakh Republic. In the section "The Reader Poses a Question" an expert from the regional bureau of trade expertise raised the issue of poor quality and the inability of clothes to stir interest in local consumers (Romakhina 1970, p. 2). The issue of lacking appeal of Soviet goods was also reflected in Soviet consumers' complaints, who in addition to such 'basic' requests as the availability of different sizes of items, demanded better quality and design, refusing to purchase outdated and undesirable products. The sphere of trade, which in the Soviet authorities' rhetoric was an essential constitutive part of 'cultured' consumption, also saw massive critique from their visitors due to the low quality of customer service. This situation of unmet supply, according to Chernyshova (2013) indicated a qualitative transformation of the Soviet consumer by late socialism – he or she was discerning and confident enough in one's right to demand better, fashionable, and desirable things.

Brezhnev's regime acknowledged this shift in expectations and 'selectiveness' of the Soviet consumer. Its attempts to address this problem through rational means, however, was not

sufficient enough, as the 1965 Kosygin reforms demonstrated. The reforms aimed to increase the proportional investment into the persistently overlooked Group B industry production, and optimize the production of consumer goods according to consumers' preference, thereby solving the issue of stockpiling unwanted goods (Hanson, 2008). Establishing direct links - cooperation between factory directors and retail workers, and introducing the practice of *khozraschyot* (cost accounting), the enterprises were thus granted greater freedom in their production plans. The reform was short-lived – researchers note that despite its relative opening of the self-regulation window for enterprises, the changes introduced were still subject to conservative factors, such as the overarching system of planned economy, price regulation, and the primacy of military industrial complex (Bacon & Sandle, 2002). A telling example of the reform's limitations was demonstrated in Abilkhozhin's book (2019) on post-Stalinist development of Kazakhstan. As the local authorities attempted to partially re-direct certain heavy industry enterprises towards the production of consumer goods, their efforts were not met with enthusiasm from the firm's directors. The latter, as he argues, insisted on their obligations to fulfill the already-set production plans, and were largely not motivated to change them. Despite the phasing out of Kosygin's reform, Chernyshova (2013) notes that its effect was substantial in relatively improving the state of production in consumer sector, while one of reform's long-term effects, arguably, was the further normalization of public discussion on consumers' desires and rights in late Soviet society.

Capitalist in form – socialist in content?

As the gap between the rhetoric of abundance and the reality of shortages of certain goods combined with stockpiles of unwanted Soviet products became more obvious, Brezhnev's government turned to external solutions to this problem. Using profits generated from the sale of natural resources, the authorities began systematic and extensive importing of consumer goods

from Western countries. The normalization of this practice in Soviet people's lives was epitomized in the tradition of 'holiday trade', where the celebration of historical ideological events was accompanied by the officially sanctioned mass sale of high-quality deficit goods imported by the state from foreign countries, including the 'capitalist' West (Chernyshova, 2013, p.38). The variety of this holiday basket included such items as "English mohair, French blouses, Italian shoes, Yugoslav furniture" (Chernyshova 2013, p. 32). Another state-mediated source of desirable goods was a chain of specialized shops called Berezki, access to which was limited to certain groups, such as foreign nationals, Soviet employees working abroad, etc. Continuing the tradition of Soviet hard-currency shops with restricted access to foreign nationals and Soviet citizens who could pay in currency or gold, Berezki were supposed to bring hard currency into the Soviet budget. They were established in the early 1960s across the Union's capital and special cities, and provided a diversity of high-quality deficit goods, both made in the USSR and imported from abroad. According to Anna Ivanova (2018), initially, Berezki shops were supposed to work as a sort of 'souvenir' shops, trading items made in the USSR to foreign tourists. This approach started to change from the 1970s, when official proposals were made on adding imported goods into Berezki's assortments, including such non-orthodox items as chewing gum. Ranging from such perishable products as sausages, meat, and caviar, to shoes, technical appliances, like TVs, record players, and even cars, these shops represented a consumer paradise for Soviet people (Ivanova, 2018). Gradually, access to Berezki became less strict in practice - foreign currency and special checks that were used for purchasing the commodities often became a source of speculation. As a result, even if still quite limited, imported and deficit goods gained more liquidity through direct individual purchases, but also through the officially illegal re-selling of these goods on black market.

Not only tangible, but also the visual presence of imported goods became part of everyday life imagination of the Soviet consumer through media outlets. The importance of foreign, but even Soviet movies in promoting the Soviet consumer's fascination with Western things has been widely discussed in scholarship on Soviet consumption and cultural changes. However, even such less visually loud sources as newspaper articles can be seen as a medium of normalization of things-not-Soviet being present in public discourse. For example, issues of *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* from the late Soviet period demonstrate repeated use of textual and visual advertisements of Czechoslovak and Hungarian goods and achievements in production. An article called "Greetings from free Hungary" (Panova 1970, p. 3) boasted about the country's material and technological advancement, reporting about a local exhibition that displayed such items as most up-to-date models of TV sets, crafted furniture, and collection of seasonal fashionable clothes "Fall-Winter". Other posts featuring pictures of trendy pairs of women's shoes from Lithuania (Figure 1), and crystal chandeliers from Czechoslovakia also portrayed the material abundance and modernness of foreign goods.

While these countries were part of the socialist block, still the widespread praising of non-Soviet products set against the often-times critical discussion of the Soviet consumer sector created the perceptive and hierarchical difference between Soviet and 'imported' goods. An illustrative example of this phenomenon can be found in one the sketches from Soviet satirical TV journal *Fitil'* (*Fitil' Kinozhurnal* (1965)) from 1965, called "Boots". The story portrays two Muscovite women's attitude towards the same pair of boots – at the beginning, when they know that the boots are made in the USSR, they become highly critical of their shameful outdatedness, especially in the eyes of European observers. However, when they think that the boots were made in Paris, the

same pair of shoes becomes extremely desirable to them, prompting them to exclaim that such things can never be made by Soviet producers.

Товары для народа

ЛИТОВСКАЯ ССР. 3 миллиона 750 тысяч пар женской и детской обуви различных моделей выпустит в нынешнем году Вильнюсское объединение кожевенно-обувных предприятий имени П. Эйдукявичюса. Предприятие постоянно обновляет ассортимент продукции. Всесоюзный художественный совет высоко оценил и утвердил 146 новых моделей туфель и босоножек современного силуэта на 1973 год.

НА СНИМКЕ: бригадир экспериментального цеха объединения Галина Петрэшюнене демонстрирует новые образцы женских туфель.

Фото А. Бразайтиса.

Фотохроника ТАСС.

ЭТО ИНТЕРЕСНО

Figure 1. Fashionable shoes in abundance in the socialist Latvia. Caption: "Consumer Goods". Source: Photo by A. Brazaitis, *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* (Aug. 1972)

The "Boots" episode from *Fitil'* represents just one the numerous examples of how things could affect people in unpredictable and subversive ways. The Soviet 'cultured' consumer under Brezhnev's regime, as previous analysis demonstrates, became not a distant future, but an active part of present modernity. He or she was 'sophisticated' enough, to refuse the blind consumption

of goods and demanded better conditions of customer service, which ironically, made them a perfect example of Stalin's 'cultured' consumer. Irony aside, the problem of modern consumer for Brezhnev's regime, lied in the fact that this subject was growing more selective towards Soviet things, and did not refuse to 'blindly' consume Western products. Thus, the modernity that the Soviet society inhabited by the time of late socialism, was much more heterogeneous in its materiality - the source and form of abundance became more diverse. In addition to the state itself paradoxically acting as an agent in promoting the consumption of Western commodities through increased reliance on imports, Soviet consumers themselves began to exhibit more agency in acquiring desirable things. Whether it was the officially sanctioned specialized shops, professional trips and travel, the use of ateliers and private tailors, or technically illegal activities of using the services of fartsovshiki, black market, and 'speculation' with foreigners, consumer culture under Brezhnev became more ambiguous. While these alternative sources of consumption were not new to the practices of Soviet people in the economy of shortages, it was arguably people's desire for fashionability during the Brezhnev's regime that created an ideological challenge both for authorities, but also for the more conservative strata of Soviet society.

Negotiating the agency of things – the Soviet mode of life

Just as the Soviet population started to exhibit more agency in defining the sphere of consumer culture, so did the things that were involved in this process. To begin with, consumer culture rhetoric under Brezhnev changed from its predecessor's ascetic and standardized treatment of things as agents of simplicity and impersonal rationality. As a reflection of this 'sophistication' in the meanings of material objects, Brezhnev's regime criticized its predecessor for standardized treatment of material abundance. The latter was seen as a limitation to the fostering of people's creative thinking and full-rounded development of their spirit. Fashion experts and social science

researchers of this period produced numerous works analyzing the nature of fashion and youth culture emerging in the Soviet Union's public life. These researchers often acknowledged the importance of individuals' striving for self-expression. As such, an analytical brochure on the sociological and social psychology interpretation of fashion, for example noted that "a man who is dressed according to the general canons of fashion is not really dressed up […] Choosing one or another type of clothes, its style, the individual, who associated oneself with a specific social group, uses these as social symbols, which serve the function of regulating the relations between people" (Petrov, 1974, pp.27, 48). Thus, one's consumer choices and ascetics could vary from person to person, depending on the social belonging and the needs of that individual. As Sergey Oushakine (2014) suggests, while this approach marked a move from Khrushchev's intrusive standardization of the private sphere, the new regime's legitimation of personalized consumption as being conducive for creativity still echoed the 'traditional' productivist ethos of mass Soviet ideology (Oushakine 2014, p.201).

Having said that things could speak for a person, not all of such self-expression was deemed as 'properly' reflecting the spirit of an individual in a constructive way. Material objects could also acquire negative agency, and it is this narrative that was widely transmitted in the newspapers and satirical journals of that period. The element of desire that certain things were able to incite in modern Soviet consumer's behavior was seen as particularly dangerous and destabilizing for the well-being of Soviet society. Crime stories repeatedly featured consumer goods, especially 'luxurious' imported or deficit ones, as influential actors in manipulating ordinary people into fraud connections with speculators. A section called "From Court Room" in *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* reported a criminal case about the 'cultured' pianist Ariadna Bassova (Yevdokimova, 1972) who despite her sophisticated background, engaged in speculative activity, claiming to be a

simple mediator for those, who wanted to acquire deficit goods. According to this story, her numerous acquaintances fell victim to the promises of getting access to such shortage things as carpet, fashionable boots, a child costume, imported coat, etc. Interestingly, the morale of this story lied not in the fact that people could not purchase things that they wanted, but in the consequences of their desires. Desire for material things and the things themselves are thus presented as dangerous, born out of people's naïve ignorance, and therefore prone to easy external manipulation.

Gendered manipulation was another common trope of empowering and vilifying material objects. Feuilletons and caricatures in the Soviet Kazakh republican satirical journal *Shmel'* often depicted the images of young females in the company of or talking about men with privileged status as the gateway to desirable things. Thus, both men and women in the process became blind victims of the corrupting power of things, where the latter serve as a medium for achieving self-interested and morally low objectives.

The relationship between gender and fashion was also particularly popular in Soviet periodicals' sections on the social ills of 'capitalist' West. A feuilleton about mini-skirts from a Canadian 'father of wonderful daughters' in *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* (Chekuolis, 1971) discussed the 'true' meaning of fashionability. According to the author, the fast-changing fashion for things was oppressive for Canadian women, who had to conform to the popular trends in order to stay competitive in 'selling' their appearance. Fashionable clothes in this account were a reflection of perpetual oppression of females in capitalist societies, since the maintenance of their physical attractiveness was the only way they could secure material well-being. Chekuolis characterizes the position of women in the 'West' as follows: "She has very little opportunities for

independent activity – a secretary, a saleswoman, a clerk of small caliber […] There is only one path for 'career' – a successful marriage".

Figure 2. Materialistic women. Caption: "And what did you find in him? Neither a head of fashion atelier, nor an artist, nor a film director…". Source: Drawing by V. Arisskina, *Shmel'* no.3 (March 1969).

What these narratives suggested, thus, was that the Soviet consumers still needed authoritative guidance as discerning protection against improper interaction and understanding of the contemporary sea of material abundance. In addition to the role of the state and its experts in inculcating 'proper', socially beneficial meanings of consumption, these stories implied the importance of the Soviet public refusing the lure of black market, thus securing the authoritative position of the Soviet state in determining the sources for material things. The idea of the Soviet/socialist mode of life as being morally superior to the profit-driven self-interested culture of the 'West" became an essential part of the official discourse on consumption. Oushakine (2014) in his research on the symbolic role of the material in Soviet culture offers the following quote from sociological article on the meaning of 'socialist mode of life': "the satisfaction and formation of needs (*potrebnosti*) are inseparable from the efficient struggle against the fascination with consumption, against hoarding, and against the cult of things. The democratization of consumption, the overcoming of the desire for conspicuous luxury and non-rational consumption habits—all that is the characteristic feature of the socialist mode of life" (Oushakine, 2014, p.223). This model of 'moral' consumption became an operational framework for addressing the issues of consumer behavior both in relation to the Soviet person-gone-bad, i.e. consumerist, but also in comparing it against the corrupt and soulless capitalist consumption of the West. Another aspect of addressing the problem of the subversive agency of things was the promotion of collective vigilance. In the post-Stalinist regimes' move from reliance on harsh mass repressions, arguably, the role of society itself in working as a collective censor, became more relevant.

The history of consumer culture transformation in the Soviet Union sheds light on how the Soviet society changed and became more complex by Brezhnev's period of rule. The top-down entrance of 'modernity' through things gradually led to the reconfiguration of state-society

relationship. Largely adopting the authorities' rhetoric on consumer culture, the Soviet people grew more demanding and 'righteous' in their requests for consumer experience. A shift towards what the Soviet authorities saw as unproductive and obsessive desire for things, especially non-Soviet, in turn, illustrated the appearing heterogeneity of subjective values and perceptions of materiality among the Soviet people. One might wonder whether it was an inevitable turn, or if substantial improvements in quantity and quality of Soviet goods could have satisfied the Soviet consumer.

Chapter 2: Consuming the Soviet way: Western in form, socialist in content

While the previous chapter attempted to draw a picture of late Soviet consumer primarily from a 'domestic' perspective, this part of the thesis is focused more on tracing the evolution of the Soviet authorities' attitude towards the West and how it translated into policies related to consumption and citizens' interaction with the 'capitalist' world. As this chapter highlights, from the early stages, the Soviet authorities willingly utilized capitalist 'West' as the model of modernization and development. Adapting Western experience and practices to the Soviet context ranged from the 1920s idealistic visions of industrialization and mechanization to the late Soviet attempts to match the American scientific achievements in computer technologies. A decisive shift in state policies that allowed 'Western' influence to enter the Soviet everyday in a more tangibly foreign, albeit still limited and surveilled way, was marked by Khrushchev's undertaking at undoing the legacy of Stalinist autarkic foreign policy decisions. Using archival sources and periodicals, this chapter looks into the social implications and ambiguities that Khrushchev regime's changes brought about for the succeeding regime.

2.1. West as a model of modernity

Consumption from the West at its earlier stages reflected the Soviet authorities' practical approach to advancing the country towards modernization and greater output productivity. The idea of combined development, whereby a less industrialized and developed state could import the existing knowledge and technology from advanced countries to accelerate its state of technological modernization served as a justification for the Soviet government importing the techniques and models of production from Western capitalist countries. Richard Stites quotes Lenin, reflecting on the aftermath of WWI, where he points out the critical role of high mechanization and social organization in determining modernization and, thus, the state's relative power in the face of

potential wars (Stites, 1989, p. 147). Borrowing from the experience and technology of the industrialized West, the Soviet state itself in this way became one of the primary consumers of imported ideas, products, and machinery.

One of the ways in which the enchantment with Western, and specifically, American, industrial productivism, materialized in the early Soviet project, was the adoption of Taylorist and Fordist approaches to organizing industrial construction. Lewis Siegelbaum (2011), in his book on the history of automobiles in the USSR, for example, demonstrates how both imaginary and tangible 'West' served as the model for the 1920s Soviet technological utopia. In the minds of many Soviet people, an American Ford vehicle-production system with Detroit as its city-manufacturer represented an ideal source for conceptualizing future Soviet society, characterized by industrial efficiency and mass output production. The material aspect of acquiring American experience, in turn, was embodied both in the sizable purchase of vehicles from Ford company and in the first trucks and private cars produced at Soviet automobile plants *ZIS* and *GAZ*. The latter was modeled on and manufactured largely using imported technological equipment from American automobile enterprises. This aspect created numerous problems for the Soviet automobile industry production due to the persistent dependency on building, and frequently also repairing, the Soviet technological utopia on the supply from and coordination with foreign companies.

The case of the Soviet authorities appropriating the technology of automobile production from the West can serve as a useful lens for exploring the issue of ambiguity of the West in the Soviet context. On the one hand, the Western automobile's capitalist identity presupposed concepts such as personal purchase, individual property, and the freedoms the vehicle allowed its users. While the goal of mass production of automobiles as part of the Soviet future utopia of abundance

allowed for the accessibility of car usage for all, its individual property aspect was less clear. The communist context of the Soviet car's existence, as some arguments went, would make the idea of private possession of cars unnecessary (Siegelbaum,2011). The socialist identity of Soviet 'Fords', however, in reality, was translated through the peculiarity of the Soviet centralized economy – access to cars took place mainly through state-controlled distribution and limited private purchasing by privileged groups after 1936. Unlike the Western automobile, therefore, its early Soviet 'brother' was not framed as an object of personal consumption but rather as a state-distributed privilege.

2.2. West as a model of 'Soviet' consumer abundance

However, adopting Western ideas and material objects was not limited to purely technological understanding of modernity. While heavy industry continued to play an underlying role in the construction of the Soviet future, the mid-1930s demonstrated an official turn towards the Soviet person as a consumer through attempted improvements in light industries. The policy of cultured trade promoted by Stalin in the 1930s signified a break from ascetic aesthetics and established the course on the visions of material abundance and sophistication of consumers' taste. Anastas Mikoyan, in his memoir *Tak bylo* (1999), gives a detailed account of his business trip to the USA in 1936 as USSR's People's Commissar of the food industry. Dispatched by Stalin to study American practices in the food industry to bring the best ones back to the USSR, Mikoyan spent 2 months visiting local factories, supermarkets, stores, and cafes to establish connections with local manufacturers, as well as observe and integrate their technological practices within the Soviet Union. The 'best practices' he ended up importing to the USSR included technologies for making bread, ice-cream, hamburgers, refrigerators, soft drinks, and other products. What made the 'American' way especially appealing to the Soviet authorities was its efficiency and production

standards that ensured the supply of both quantity and quality of consumer goods. Thus, while the Soviet Union already had an ongoing domestic supply of such items as ice cream, juices, and champagne, for example, the scale, efficiency, and quality of the Soviet model significantly lagged behind American technologies.

The shape of the Soviet Union's progress as Jukka Gronow (2003) suggests, was conceptualized through the combination of old and new world ideas about prosperity. The old-world interpretation consisted mostly of pre-revolutionary 'bourgeois' tastes. Soviet cultured shops thus were selling such 'luxury' goods as caviar, chocolate, cheeses, etc. The new world image of Soviet trade modernization, in turn, took its blueprint based on the American example, albeit only in certain cities. Moscow's TsUM, Leningrad's Passazh, Gastronom, and other model stores took their inspiration from the US large department stores, such as New York's Macy's (Hessler, 2004). A number of Soviet study trips were initiated in the 1930s to transfer the American organization of trade, focusing on such features as the aesthetics of the shops, quality of customer service, and the behavior of customers. Unlike their capitalist colleagues, the Soviet sales workers were considered responsible not only for the 'selling' of goods to their customers but also for educating them about good taste - how to behave in the shop, what to consume and how, etc. It is impressive to notice how Stalin's discourse of cultured trade continued its existence well into late socialism. The improvement of customer service and the necessity of educating the Soviet consumer were often cited by the Brezhnevite regime as a cure for dealing with the lowering interest of the Soviet public in purchasing domestic goods.

Stalin's discourse on cultured consumption is interpreted by some scholars as the embourgeoisement of the Soviet project, while others see it as a practical step in the regime's self-legitimation strategy of adding carrots to the primarily stick-based relationship with its citizens.

The two approaches do not necessarily have to contradict each other, and in a way reflect the Soviet model of Western-oriented ideas of modernity. Being modernized, thus, included not only the image of mechanical industrialization but also the material benefits that it entailed. To quote Jukka Gronow's (2003, p. 14) perfect encapsulation of the idea behind the Soviet adoption of Western modernity: “Now, thanks to the Communist Party and its great leader, Comrade Stalin, every worker could live like an aristocrat.” Thus, even if the form of consumption was modeled on ‘capitalist’ aesthetics, its content was presented as the achievement of the Soviet 'socialist' system and Stalin himself. The product of Stalin’s regime pre-war learning from the West was realized into a ‘Soviet’ item. Be it the famous Soviet ice-cream, Russian kvas, or Gastronom, it was the behind-the-screen mechanisms that featured imported experience, but the outward, public identity of the product was a ‘Soviet’ advertisement. The taste of Soviet 'aristocracy,' however, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, to a large extent retained its elitist quality. Cultured trade and consumption of caviar, champagne, gramophones, and perfume remained a prerogative of nomenklatura, Stakhanovite workers, and intelligentsia.

2.3. Modernization – between threat and opportunity

The discussion on the Soviet-West relationship in the realm of consumer experience cannot go without considering the importance of WWII in opening up new opportunities for encountering the previously imagined other and the subsequent challenges and anxieties it created for Soviet authorities. While the war-period is not the main focus of this dissertation, its long-term impact in establishing the ground for the policies of subsequent periods, including the area of consumption, cannot be overlooked. In addition to the most direct factor of a Soviet person crossing the boundaries into foreign territories – an act that was hardly possible in the pre-war period, non-Soviet things also acquired mobility in accessing a wider audience within the Soviet Union.

Objects from the West, either as a product of lend-lease or the Soviet military's war booty, became part of Soviet materiality. American cars and trucks sent to the USSR made their way through the war, some of their lives commonly ending in “collective farms where they survived into the 1960s serving chairmen and other local bigwigs.” (Siegelbaum, p.216). Clothes and food, part of the Western aid to the struggling Soviet population, became an object of memory about the high quality of “American” goods (Moine, 2013). Patterns of their distribution, in turn, yet again demonstrated the hierarchical system of consumption in the Soviet Union, as the ability to choose what and how much to consume was often defined by the military ranks and professional groups that a person/family belonged to. An interesting example of such privileged access to war trophies that might have reflected the pre-war advertisement of 'cultured' consumption with a taste of bourgeois values was the ability of higher rank military officers to bring back European pianos, cars, furniture, and art.

While the material element of consuming Western things was justified as part of war circumstances, the cultural aspect of Western influence in the Soviet Union was more ambiguous. As a consequence of wartime interaction with Western soldiers, American jazz became one of the cultural products that spread among the Soviet people. The so-called “trophy” movies of German, French, Italian, and American production, also became a part of Soviet public life. Intentionally brought back from occupied territories, these movies helped generate substantial and necessary profits for the Soviet government due to their outstanding popularity among local audience (Roth-Ey, 2011). The opening of the cultural window to the West, however, soon became subject to ideological attacks, culminating in the 1948 campaign against rootless cosmopolitanism and American imperialism.

Analyzing the dynamics of Soviet authoritative discourse on the ideological meaning of the products of 'Western' culture, Alexey Yurchak (2005) uses the terms 'contradictory' and 'ambiguous' West, referring to the situational approach employed by Soviet officials in defining the conditions of acceptable use of Western culture. Thus, while previously allowed jazz faced heavy ideological criticism from authorities, Western trophy movies continued their existence in Soviet cinemas, despite the presence of public letters complaining about the 'bourgeois propaganda' and inappropriate behavior displayed through these movies. Such a selective approach, Yurchak (2005, p. 232) suggests, demonstrated that in evaluating the acceptability of using Western content, "the meaning of cultural forms depended on who practiced them, how, and in what context". In the case of American trophy movies, for example, Kristin Roth-Ey (2011) argues, it was the commercial interest of the state itself that overweighted the ideological ambiguity of screening non-Soviet, and what was perceived by some as sexualized, content. Its authoritative role in adapting the bourgeois product to the Soviet context was realized through the editing of the movies – changing titles, adding opening subtitles about the ideological meaning of the story, the latter being in a grotesque way justified, as the content of the movies was altered with some scenes being cut out to suit the Soviet spectator.

2.4. Thaw: Integrating Western consumption with Soviet upgrading

The change in the Soviet official course to a consumer-oriented model is often linked to its emulation of the Western model of development (Castillo, 2005). Indeed, Khrushchev's reframing of Cold War competition into the sphere of everyday life – his promise to achieve the American level of living standards and surpass them, suggests the Soviet authorities' acceptance of the game, where the cards seem to have been set by its capitalist counterpart. However, this picture of 'catching up' Soviet Union was not as simple. In addition to the material side of consumer

abundance competition, Khrushchev's regime also pursued the agenda of demonstrating the unique benefits of the Soviet socialist system. While under Stalin's rule, this attempt crystallized in Soviet patriotism with the flavor of Russian culture, its successors opted for a more 'internationalist' approach. Borrowing from Western achievements, Khrushchev's regime aimed to show an alternative model of modernity, one where Soviet socialism served as a savior from capitalist manipulation of countries and individuals based on the latter's succumbence to irrational desires. Socialist consumption as an ideal, in the process, became marketed not only to its domestic audience but also globally.

The Soviet Union's isolationist policy was abruptly ended with Stalin's death and the new regime's discourse of peaceful coexistence with the West. In its effort to bring the country back to the international scene of cultural cooperation and trade, Khrushchev's government took a course on 'marketing' the USSR as part of the modern, technologically developed world. As () put it, technology became ideologically neutral, meaning that echoing the pre-war period, importing knowledge and modern practices from the technologically advanced West became normalized in official discourse. Using Western experience in improving the living standards of Soviet people was particularly noticeable in the sphere of home and domestic appliances. Following several exhibitions featuring the technological wonders of American homes, where the presence of TVs, refrigerators, and numerous kitchen gadgets was used to demonstrate the benefits of the capitalist system's development, Khrushchev's regime took on the challenge of not only producing the same results but even outperforming them (Reid, 2002).

Adopting Western form with socialist content in imagining the modern present and future was readily observable in the official turn in Soviet aesthetics towards modernist style. In an effort to break the stereotypical Western-promoted image of the USSR as a backward, primitive land of

oppressed people and material shortages, Khrushchev's regime engaged in the physical and imaginary transformation of Soviet exterior and interior design. Greg Castillo (2010) offers an illustrative example of this sudden change of official discourse in Soviet-controlled East Germany. Where under Stalin's regime, West Germany's architectural style Bauhaus was denounced for its formalist cosmopolitan character, the new authorities called for a shift from what now was considered the outdated decorativism of its predecessor, favoring instead the rationality and simplicity of Bauhaus modernism. While this could be interpreted as part of Khrushchev's domestic campaign against the excesses of Stalinism, it also was indicative of the new regime's commitment to present itself as an agent of modernity on the international scene.

Making the Soviet Union appear 'contemporary' and developed became particularly relevant, as the opening of borders entailed a boom in the organization and participation of the USSR in international exhibitions and festivals. For the Soviets, this meant not only going outside but also bringing the world inside – the World Youth Festival of 1957 was for the first time held in Moscow, the 'heartland' of the USSR. Making the country attractive for international visitors and cooperation was one of the driving forces behind the re-modeling of Moscow's architectural aesthetics in preparation for the festival launched in 1955 (Peacock, 2012). Anne Gorsuch (2010) similarly notes in her analysis of the Thaw period's cinema how visual representation of Moscow, in particular, but also other parts of the Soviet Union, was focused on demonstrating the material and cultural advancement of Soviet socialism to the external eye. The images included the mass availability of modern housing, a variety of consumer goods, cars, hotels, and international cultural presence in Soviet people's everyday life. Looking at such movies as *Russian Souvenir* and *I Walk Around Moscow*, Gorsuch (2010, p.162) points out, "It is just this ordinariness of the international that is significant." Thus, just as the rest of the world, the Soviet Union was pictured as a place

with developed consumer culture, where enjoyment of life, the comforts of modernity, and the interest in the outside world were 'normal'.

While the aesthetics of 'new' Soviet modernity was aimed at reversing its Stalinist image, the inspiration for this change in everyday life reality derived mostly from the European idea of the West. The Khrushchev regime's conceptualization of 'model' modernity in this way resembled the Stalinist discourse on culturedness, promoted in the pre-war period. The attainments of socialism encompassed the provision of 'civilized' conditions of life, with consumer abundance, but also those, who could use these objects in a proper well-mannered, educated, and aesthetically smart style. What made the Thaw-period conceptualization special was that this image of culturedness was supposed to inspire both domestic and international audiences. International festivals and exhibitions served as platforms for demonstrating the achievements of Soviet industry and social development.

Nevertheless, this promotion of cultural and technological international exchange had a double side to it. As Margaret Peacock (2012) points out in her analysis of the World Youth Festival in Moscow, while the Soviet authorities were willing to advertise the Soviet citizen as knowledgeable and open for communication with the world, they simultaneously engaged in controlling the boundaries of such interchange. Interacting with American delegates in public and in the context of official events could be considered a proper cultural exchange, while young people's communication in the privacy of apartments, involving alcohol and dancing, was deemed as potentially dangerous and undermining of the ideal Soviet man's image. Alexey Yurchak (2005) draws a similar observation in regard to the cultural engagement of Soviet citizens with Western music, radio broadcasts, and periodicals. As long as one's consumption of things foreign was tied to the cultural enrichment of an individual as a Soviet citizen aimed at well-rounded knowledge

about the world, this interest was considered appropriate. It should be noted that such a protectionist approach had its rational grounds. Soviet people's encounters with Western material and cultural products both inside the country and abroad were often accompanied by foreign press's use of their stereotypical portrayal. Depicting Soviet people as poor, shabby looking, and fascinated by Western goods, foreign periodicals themselves helped perpetuate the divide between the 'socialist' and the 'capitalist' worlds (Gorsuch, 2011, p.159; Reid, 2002, p.240).

2.5. Late socialism: materialization of Western consumption, 'Soviet' becomes post-material

Relationship towards the West with the shift of power to Brezhnev essentially continued along the framework of peaceful coexistence and cooperation that marked the early years of Khrushchev's rule. The policy of détente that began in the late 1960s with a series of treaties and agreements marked a mutual effort at stabilizing the relationship between the US and USSR following nuclear confrontations between the 2 sides. In 1971 at the 24th congress of the communist party of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev presented the so-called Peace Program, the rhetoric which put the USSR and the socialist countries at the forefront of the anti-war campaign, espousing the values of international cooperation and development (Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya 1986). This pointed to the 'openness' of the USSR to the external world but also its moral superiority in directing the course of world peace and promoting conditions for global prosperity.

Unlike his predecessor, Brezhnev abstained from radical claims of open competition with the US, rather focusing on the cooperative attitude of the Soviet regime. In his unofficial meeting with American astronauts in 1975 following a joint space mission between the two countries, Brezhnev consistently used the language of non-competition, emphasizing the scientific-technological progress that the Cold War superpowers could bring about through cooperation (Vstrecha Brezhneva 1975). The importance of stabilizing the relationship with the US and

Western Europe, as Autio-Sarasmo (2016) and Sanchez (2014) suggest, was seen as critical for the Soviet Union's economic and technological development. Through increased collaboration with the industrialized West, the Soviet government aimed to intensify scientific-technological exchange and gain access to foreign trade channels.

The rhetoric and attempts at normalizing the relations between the Cold War rivals notwithstanding, as Mike Bowker (2002) points out, détente was fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. The idea of cooperative existence was set against a continual lack of trust in the the motives of the other party, while also generating ideological resistance within domestic politics. Soviet public representation of the US and Western Europe continued to promote stereotypical portrayal of the 'capitalist' West. The all-union satirical journal *Krokodil* and its republican counterparts, like Kazakh *Shmel'*, frequently demonstrated caricatures and feuilletons of the capitalist countries as greedy, cunning, and exploitative. Analyzing the Soviet periodicals' portrayal of the untrustworthy collective West, some of the following common narratives can be identified: links between past and present through the lens of WWII, Western imperialism and colonial outlook, and West and social inequality. In these depictions, straightforward cartoons of the militaristic and aggressive foreign policy of the US are complemented by more subtle short stories that are used to unveil the exploitative character of capitalist systems.

Connecting the idea of collective West in the present with the experience of World War II and Nazism was one of the ways in which the Soviet periodicals tried to evoke a negative attitude towards Western countries among the domestic audience. For example, one of the humorous sketches entitled "Atlantic combinations," published in the Kazakh Soviet Republic-based journal *Shmel'* (Mirimanov 1969, p. 11), recounted a story featuring businessmen from England and West Germany. In it, the latter was trying to deceive his English colleague-rival so as to gain dominance

in the foreign trade of clothes. In the end, the Englishman recognizes in him the frightened German SS soldier to whom he lent countenance during the war years. Having realized that the manipulative and unpleasant German businessman is a former Nazi, the Englishman exclaims "Gentlemen! To hell! Along with your Atlantic 'mutual understanding…". Another war memory-related story brought up the issue of the capitalist West's growing interest in Hitler-related things. By associating the capitalist West with the fascist past, stories of that nature aimed to appeal to not only the 'traditional' Marxist ideological reasons behind the faultiness of the West, but also the patriotic sentiment of the Soviet people.

Emphasizing the imperial nature of the capitalist West was another frequently used method of discrediting its image among the domestic audience. In *Shmel's* feuilleton, "Sir Archibald is in wonder," Plashevsky (1973, p. 11), the author, depicts an encounter between two Englishmen and an exceptionally beautiful Asian woman at one of the beaches in the UK. Impressed by the Asian woman's appearance – her beautiful face, but mostly, her 'well-proportioned' figure, both men concluded that the 'child of Asia' must be a model or anything else that does not constitute intellectual work. What brings Sir Archibald into a state of wonder, as the story moves to the setting of an international scientific conference, is the fact that this woman turned out to be a well-known, 'very talented researcher' from Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. The language of symbolic meanings in this story adds an interesting twist to the stereotypical ideological story about the imperialist exploitative nature of the West. As such, the Englishmen in this sketch are portrayed as inherently arrogant and prejudiced in their perception of what people with characteristics of 'Asian', 'female', and 'beautiful' are capable of. In contrast to the West's limited vision, the Soviet Union appears as a cradle of cultural decolonization and women's emancipation. In the Soviet Union, unlike the

West, the story suggests, women could be Asian, and still well-shaped, beautiful, educated, and successful.

Finally, the issue of the capitalist West and social inequality also appears prominently in public discourse on the falseness of the Western image of prosperity. While Brezhnev did not pursue Khrushchev's rhetoric of catching up and overtaking the West in terms of living standards, material abundance as an indicative factor of the socialist system's success remained prominent. The growing realization of the Soviet Union's inability to compete with the West on material terms was channeled into the unmasking of the capitalist countries' lies about 'real' material conditions and their social cost for ordinary people. In addition to stories about inequality and racism in the US, a frequent theme featured in Soviet periodicals was the unhappy fate that awaited potential Soviet emigres to the West. In the *Tselinogradskaya Pravda* article "Two worlds – two ways of life: the price of fatal mistakes", Gasselbakh (1970, p. 8) offered life stories of ethnic Germans living in Soviet Ukraine and Kazakhstan, who got lured into emigrating to West Germany. Their Soviet lives, taking place in Soviet rural areas, are portrayed as full of productive work, the joys of communal life and friendship, and access to social care. However, false promises and their relatives' propaganda of the good life in the West and their subsequent move there are painted in opposite terms. Their 'new' lives, in reality, become lonely, jobless, and devoid of state support through guaranteed healthcare. In these scenarios, looking into the mirror of the West, the Soviet socialist state reflects back the role of a loving parent, who is not simply interested in gaining profit from its people, but aims to provide good living standards for all. Another facet of this story is the value ascribed to the Soviet society itself, its way of life, characterized by mutual support, shared history, and love for their country.

2.7. Travel limitations and indirect contact/experience of the West

The shift of Soviet foreign policy from Stalinist cultural autarky to Khrushchev's proclaimed internationalism generated new alternative ways of acquainting with the West. Travel, in theory, could be one of the options of getting a first-hand experience with the otherwise cartoonish Western 'other'. As Gorsuch (2011) notes, however, Soviet Western internationalism in the form of leisure travel was largely limited to East European countries. Western Europe and the US as physical spaces remained beyond access for most Soviet people. Travel there had to be justified and negotiated with Soviet authorities, and essentially consisted of professional trips, proportionally dominated by the Soviet male population.

The degree of official surveillance over travel to Western countries can be traced in the archival materials on cultural life in the late Soviet Union. The response to Maya Plisetskaya and her husband's application to visit a friend in Europe, for example, contained such detailed information as who was going to cover the cost of the trip, its duration and location, and the permission itself being signed by high Soviet officials, including Suslov, Shelepin and Andropov (Tavanets 2009, p. 23). While the famous Soviet ballerina's request was approved, documents on the Soviet poet Yevtushenko offered a more complicated picture (Tavanets 2009, p. 18, 19, 53).

The poet had to extensively explain why he needed to accept the invitation of his Italian colleagues, as well as reasons justifying his trustworthiness in representing the Soviet Union abroad. In his letter, Yevtushenko admits and shows remorse about the previous instances of his dangerous behavior on trips to Western countries, and lists the ways in which he repented his sins, which should allow him to be re-installed into the ranks of reliable members of the Soviet intelligentsia. Yevtushenko further reinforces his request by appealing to the importance of promoting the Soviet international image and aspirations to be a part of the modern world: “[…] it is impossible, in our day and age, to be a citizen poet without mering domestic and international

themes. […] I can say that through my trips abroad, I brought more benefit than harm to our Motherland, and was her, if sometimes faulty, but still genuine propagandist" (Tavanets 2009, p.20). While eventually, the poet was allowed to attend a conference in Italy, the external report after his trip indicated dissatisfaction with his expressions there, suggesting further ideological and educational work with him.

Travel to the West for ordinary Soviet citizens was even less realistic. In private correspondence between two brothers, a Soviet journalist based in Tselinograd received a letter where his brother shared a desire to visit his friend in Paris, who promised to sponsor the trip. He immediately drops his hopes, however, stating that "[he] of course would not be allowed to do so, since he has no legitimate reasons – no relatives in Paris, and therefore stood no chance of receiving an international passport for travel". Another pre-condition to travel mentioned by one of the interviewees was the importance of being a party member, or as he sarcastically put it, 'Communists went there [abroad], because of good work and recommendations" (Respondent Sultan Galiyev, Baikonur). Even good work, though, as he further notes, did not always guarantee one's chance of going abroad. A friend of his, he shared, being a prominent scientist in a space research institute, was consistently denied official permission to participate in international scientific conferences, despite multiple invitations that he received from colleagues abroad.

What these series of documents and individual stories suggest is how restricted and officially controlled the actual contact with the West remained under late socialism. Retaining strong vigilance over international travel was implemented both for ideologically protective reasons, and to maintain the Soviet Union's international prestige. The Soviet authorities discouraged direct contacts between Westerners and Soviet people when it came to foreign tourists visiting the USSR, and the same applied to Soviet tourists abroad. Anne Gorsuch (2011, p.151)

characterized this vigilant framework “Affinity was fine, desire was not”. Archival documents related to travel accordingly reveal authorities' seriousness in monitoring the Soviets travelers, and foreign tourists' activity in the Soviet Union. One of the reports, for example, indicated the ideologically undermining actions of one of the foreign tourists in Alma Ata, who "passed an American magazine *Newsweek* and the program schedule for "The Voice of America"" (APP, f. 708, op. 60, d. 104, pp. 158-9). Unsanctioned interactions with foreigners, often involving material objects, similarly, were registered in the travel commission's reports: "In 1974 there have been received materials on 107 people, who within the circumstances of being abroad behaved unacceptably: breached the set norms of behavior, established suspicious contacts with foreigners, committed amoral actions, engaged in speculative deals with foreigners" (APP, d. 708, op. 60, d. 104, pp. 153-4). The Soviet authorities, thus, strove to maintain control over the experience of internationalism, whether mediated through private connections between individuals, acquisition of foreign cultural and material objects, or one’s conduct while visiting *zagranitsa*.

2.8. Consuming the “West”: the ambiguity of Soviet modernity

The complexity of East-West relations became particularly evident in the sphere of material and cultural consumption. As it was mentioned earlier in chapter 1, Brezhnev’s period demonstrated an increased presence of imported goods, with Western products enjoying particular popularity among the Soviet youth. This transfer of Western objects was operated through diverse channels that included both official, private, and practically illegal ways of obtaining these objects. The much-desired consumption of Western things consisted of such diverse variety as Western music, films, and books, as well as objects of materiality, including jeans, perfume, cosmetics, and even chewing gum. In addition to the difficulties and potential dangers involved in obtaining them, these products were also costly, compared to Soviet standards of pricing.

The presence of Western material and cultural products is often associated with the phenomenon of the Soviet second economy, implying its illicit nature in the Soviet context. However, as Anna Ivanova (2018) demonstrates in her book about Berezki stores, the sale of Western goods, in a paradoxical way, was enabled through Soviet official channels of foreign currency shops. The emergence of Berezki in 1967, a chain of special shops that traded in high quality deficit goods that were either imported from abroad or produced in the USSR for export purposes, according to Ivanova (2018), was linked to the authorities' practical need for obtaining hard currency. Targeting foreigners' purses, these shops, however, were also available for Soviet employees serving abroad, who could use special checks for privileged access to deficit goods, as well as those individuals who either earned or got foreign currency as a gift from abroad. Ivanova notes the social significance of the Berezki phenomenon in making visually obvious the limitations and inequality of the Soviet consumption system. Thus, by offering a better supply of goods to the closed-access Berezki shops at the expense of regular ones, the authorities facilitated the presence of differentiation in Soviet society. Ivanova quotes a critical excerpt from Yuz Aleshkovsky's story: "and Berezki shops […] should be shut down immediately, so that they, bastards, will not be a pain the neck of our people, and will not destroy its belief in our classless society […]" (Ivanova 2018, p.206). The presence of such specialized shops trading in imported goods thereby created a contradictory situation, when compared to the public discourse on the moral faultiness of the capitalist West.

Considering the reasons behind the presence and popularity of Western products among the Soviet youth, Alexey Yurchak offers the framework of 'contradictory West'. First of all, he identifies inconsistencies in the Soviet authorities' approach to Western cultural forms. Yurchak (2006) traces the story of the contradictory West back to Stalin's post-war period, when the Soviet

official discourse fluctuated between protectionist campaigns against expressions of Western culture and their adaptation and toleration in certain contexts, or as he frames it: "[…] the meaning of cultural forms depended on who practiced them, how, and in what context" (Yurchak 2006, p.232). The continuation of this ambivalence about Western influence in the context of late socialism was reflected in the simultaneous representation of Western culture as a form of individual educational enrichment and Soviet internationalist outlook, while its critical framework ostracized the extreme forms of Soviet people's blind obsession with foreign things. Thus, he suggests, listening to certain foreign radio broadcasts could be accepted as a beneficial practice of becoming a well-rounded, knowledgeable person, yet its excessive consumption was portrayed as an act of individualistic, non-sociable, and essentially un-Soviet behavior (Yurchak 2006, p.244).

Analyzing the social implication of such ambiguity, Yurchak (2006) argues that the majority of ordinary Soviet people did not associate themselves with this grotesque critical conceptualization of Western consumption, which made their own interest in Western culture seem non-ideological. Rather, the desire to engage with Western culture, according to him, can better be encapsulated as a reflection of the Soviet youth's deterritorialization through leisurely interaction with what he terms the 'imaginary West'. For him, the substantive emptiness that Western products embodied both in its material and cultural forms signified its 'imaginary' function within the Soviet context. Costly and hard-to-get objects of the "West", such as empty cans, plastic bags, and songs, the textual meaning of which was mostly marginal in reasons for its appeal, were thus simply portals that allowed one to be a part of alternative, non-Soviet spaces.

While these frameworks are indeed applicable and useful in understanding the relationship between the objects of Western culture, its Soviet consumers, and the observing eyes of the Soviet authorities, it does not reflect enough on the tensions involved in the consumption of Western

products and the meanings that it could produce. Sergei Zhuk's (2010) book on the history of rock and roll music in the Soviet Ukrainian city Dnepropetrovsk demonstrates well this intellectual gap in Yurchak's work. By considering how the consumption of Western culture products was interpreted by Ukrainian youth and the response of the Soviet officials to the latter's growing Westernization, Zhuk (2010) offers a more complex and contextualized picture of contradictions in late socialist society in non-central parts of the Soviet Union.

Whereas Yurchak essentially suggests a non-ideological nature of Western culture's influence on Soviet youth in Leningrad, in the case of a closed Ukrainian city, Zhuk (2010) identifies how popularization of Western music represented a challenge to the KGB officials, who tried and failed in curtailing the spread of Western influence among local youth. Their concern about the impact of Western culture in Dnipropetrovsk ranged from associations made between the consumption of Western music and Ukrainian nationalist identity-building, the revival of popular religiosity, as well as more general fears of moral disintegration through the Ukrainian youth abandoning their Soviet style of life. Such a contextualized approach is illuminating in understanding the dynamics of socio-cultural changes, as well as the agency of different official actors and ordinary people in negotiating the meanings of cultural changes.

Chapter 3: Western jeans and Soviet consumers

Anchored at the Soviet consumption of Western goods, this chapter zooms in to analyze the practices and meanings of jeans culture in late Soviet Kazakhstan. While jeans themselves were not prohibited from use, their representation in local public discourse was often associated with a broader negative image of Soviet 'Westernized' youth. Using the data collected from interviews and memoirs of the contemporaries of the Brezhnev period in Kazakhstan, this part of the thesis explores the issues of jeans accessibility, local meanings and reasons for their consumption.

3.1. Brief history of jeans

Blue jeans represent one of the most commonly thought of material symbols of Western culture's popularization in the context of the late Soviet Union. Having originated as a late 19th century working-class garment in the USA, by 1930-40s, following the socio-economic effects of the Great Depression, jeans grew into an item of mass production, acquiring a new cross-sectional status of American national symbol (Comstock 2011). The depiction of jeans by local artists and Hollywood movies, according to Comstock (2011), led to the formation of a certain image of Americanness – one, where jeans signified such unique cultural values as egalitarianism, gender non-conservatism, spirit of democratic thinking and pragmaticism. As such, the concept of jeans shifted from purely utilitarian worker clothing to the marketable all-inclusive symbol of American freedoms – freedom to wear jeans and thus self-express, regardless of one's gender or class belonging.

Following WWII and the spread of American popular and material culture, jeans went through another status transformation by becoming an object of global youth culture. The existing

research on the history of jeans and their socio-cultural impact emphasizes the appeal of aesthetics and lifestyle imagery portrayed in Hollywood movies as one of the key factors in promoting young people's interest in jeans (Gordon 1991). In addition to the cinematic impact, jeans became an attribute of a stylistic representation of one's affiliation with youth subculture and counterculture groups, including hippies and the emerging scene of rock music bands. Last, but not least, as Daniel Miller (2007) suggests, considering the American identity of jeans cannot go without mentioning the role of their production origins. The commercialization of jeans on the international market was instrumentalized by the American founding fathers of jeans, brands that became almost synonymous to the word 'jeans' themselves – Levi's, Wrangler, and Lee. The advancement of these brands and jeans production in general to England and Western Europe further added to jeans' mass culture phenomenon.

3.2. Blue jeans going 'red': jeans in the Soviet Union

As Natalya Chernyshova (2017) notes, it is hard to identify a specific moment when jeans began proliferating in the USSR, yet their emergence to social prominence is often associated with the Moscow International Youth Festival in 1957. The cultural window provided by Khrushchev's 'opening' of the USSR's iron curtain, allowed for a limited, but still unprecedented level of interaction with the 'other', in the process of which not only cultural, but also material exchange could take place. The period of 1960s, however, demonstrated a rather limited interest and sporadic presence of jeans among Soviet people (Lebina 2019, Chernyshova 2017), and it was rather during the 1970s-80s that they acquired a widespread popularity with the Soviet youth. Even though the Soviet authorities did not officially prohibit the consumption of jeans, their supply was limited mostly to the chain of closed-access Berezki stores (Ivanova 2018). The occasional sale of jeans in the central stores of Soviet central cities Moscow and Leningrad, but also their sporadic

appearance in other cities and village stores across the Soviet Union also indicated the growing use of imports for the provision of consumer goods. As Natalya Chernyshova (2017) suggests, the Soviet authorities were themselves partially responsible for the promotion of interest in jeans among local youth.

Purchasing jeans in official stores, however, was far from being a regular phenomenon, and the consumption of jeans primarily took place within the spheres of informal economy. These methods included a variety of sources and ways of obtaining jeans, such as purchasing them from illegal traders – fartsovshiki, using personal connections in the trade sector, travel, exchange and trade with foreigners, etc. Despite their limited availability, jeans had quite a wide assortment of brands in the Soviet context, that in addition to the iconic American brands Levi's, Wrangler, and Lee, also included such English, West German, Indian, and Italian 'firms' as Montana, Rifle, Lee Cooper, Milton, Wild Cat, etc. Like in other parts of the world, jeans were linked to their American identity through popular culture and associations with the 'authentic' manufacturing labels of Levi's, Wrangler, and Lee. However, in the Soviet context, jeans had a more complex web of identity due to the impact of the Cold War framework that bestowed them with ideological meanings. As a result, jeans had a more general 'Western' spatial connotation due to their symbolic placement into the category of 'capitalist' West product.

The popularity of jeans among the Soviet youth and their consumption through illegal trade ultimately led to the concession on the side of the Soviet authorities. Natalya Chernyshova (2017, p. 158) points out that already in early 1970s the authorities attempted to develop the production of Soviet-made jeans. Efforts to cooperate with American companies to transfer production technology to the Soviet Union by the end of 1970s, similarly, indicated the authorities' readiness to accommodate jeans culture in the Soviet context. The Soviet-made jeans, however, despite their

lower price and accessibility, could not compete with the perceived quality and prestige of Western goods. This in a way conditioned the ambiguous position of jeans in Soviet society, where on the one hand, the authorities strove to accommodate consumers' demands and desires for modern fashionable things, yet at the same time, public discourse consistently criticized young people's excessive interest and consumption of Western culture's products.

3.3. Images of jeans in Soviet public discourse

One of the primary reasons behind the negative portrayal of jeans was their 'Western' identity. Conceptually, jeans were framed as part of Western lifestyle and its moral degradation. Young people's indiscriminate consumption of popular cultural and material products coming from the West was seen as a socially undermining consequence of Westernized modernity and its infiltration into Soviet society. The visual and literary content of Soviet satirical magazines and newspapers often drew on the motives of bestiality of Soviet Westernized youth in their critical representation of 'decadent' West and its mass culture effect. The common imagery of ardent followers of Western trends showed young people, who listened to 'wild' rock music, dressed in extravagant ways, and correspondingly looked and behaved as wild animals. The caricature (Tukmacheva 1970, p.9). of *Shmel'* magazine presented below can serve as an illustrative example of Soviet public criticism concerning the excessive consumption of Western culture.

On the left side, the morally degenerate behavior of a man and a woman of 'recent times' seems to be linked with their immoderate choices: the man potentially wearing fashionable clothes such as jeans and long scarf, both of them having similar hairstyles, and dancing wildly to Western music. Their animal-like look is juxtaposed against the 'rightness' of the 'past'. Rather ironically - given the Soviet Union's revolutionary past - noble behavior and even aristocratic clothes on the right side seem to represent the propriety and harmonious beauty of past traditions marked by

appropriate gender conduct in one's leisurely activities. In a way, the use of 'past' traditions in this moral message suggests the timeless authenticity and importance of socially accepted values and norms of behavior. This comparison and moral message, however, assumes that the audience agrees with the normative message of the caricature, where 'proper' relationships of the past can be more desirable than contemporary loose mores, if only one chooses to remember.

Figure 3. Westernized youth and moral degradation. Caption: "This happened recently, this was a long time ago!". Source: Drawing by Tukmacheva, *Shmel'* no.1 (Jan. 1970).

Another source of Western culture's problematic influence in the Soviet Union was framed through the Stalinist model of 'rootless' cosmopolitanism. The desire for and consumption of Western trends was presented as the Soviet youth's abandonment of their cultural and national roots and traditions. Their distinct appearance constructed through fashionable Western things was set against the figures of the older generation, oftentimes utilizing ethnically informed imagery of the latter. A caricature from *Shmel'* (Penkova 1975, p.7), for example, depicts an androgynous young man who let his hair go long, sporting jeans, colorful shirt and tie, pointing out to the elderly grandmother to cross the road on green light.

The supposedly Kazakh grandmother is portrayed wearing simple clothes, and traditional head-covering shawl (*kimeshek*), carrying heavy bags along with her granddaughter across the street. The young Kazakh man addresses her using the Russian word '*babka'* as well as the informal version of you (*ty*), suggesting his lack of traditional respect in treating elderly people. Experiencing such rude treatment, the old woman is pictured with a distressed face, conveying her emotional discomfort and sadness. In this sketch, the comparison of a young Kazakh man against the grandmother wearing traditional clothes betokens the latter's loss of national identity, within the prescribed Soviet norms at the very least. The destructive impact of obsession with Western things thus is linked not only to young people's unvirtuous behavior, but also alienation from and loss of their historical roots. Similar references to traditional images were also used in the all-union satirical magazine *Krokodil*, and in the other republican versions of it. In this way, public discourse on the negative impact of Western consumption appealed to the value of the Soviet Union's policy of inter-nationalism, through which the preservation of cultural expressions and traditions was not destroyed compared to the universalizing influence of Western cosmopolitanism.

Figure 4. Loss of traditions. Caption: "Cross the street on green light, *babka*!". Source: Drawing by L. Penkova, *Shmel'* no. 10 (Oct. 1975).

The deceptive nature of Western jeans popularity was also presented using the more conventional critique of capitalism and its manipulation of people's desires. A short note "Advertisement – the engine of trade" in popular journal *Ogoniok* (1977) featured a photo of large-scale balloon imitation of Levi's jeans flying somewhere in England's sky, followed by author's sarcastic exposing of the real motives behind the company's unusual advertisement of "Cloud in pants". According to it, in reality, the brand was facing the problem of plummeting demand due to

its growing prices and inflation. The Levi's advertisement thus was presented as a desperate attempt to encourage local consumers to purchase jeans, despite the latter's increasingly limited financial means to afford the product. The popularity of jeans and their fashionability thus could be seen as the result of advertising and its deceptive power of creating false value, the aim of which was the capitalist company's greater accumulation of wealth.

Finally, an interesting contextual portrayal of jeans could be traced in *Shmel's* caricatures, where young men wearing trendy Western clothes are shown as big children spoiled by their privileged parents (Bekshoinov, 1973). The peculiarity of this narrative is that it is situated in relation to young people entering universities. Their explicitly Westernized look, however, has a more nuanced connotation. Here, the emphasis is placed less on the effect of Western culture's consumption, and instead, the critique focuses more on the issue of privileges in Soviet Kazakhstan society. The clothes and style of Kazakh 'golden' youth emphasize not only their consumption of Western products, but also special access to deficit goods thanks to their parents' privileged social belonging. Wearing branded jeans, fashionable shirts and hip hairstyles, these university applicants do not have to put any effort into passing entry exams, because their parents ensure the admission. The materiality of Western things in this social commentary, thus, is linked with the practice of privileged access, where the 'faultiness' lies not so much with the impact of Western popular culture, but rather is directed at the Soviet society itself.

Figure 5. Personal connections and privileges. Caption: "All is clear, even if he didn't say it". Source: Drawing by Bekshoinov, *Shmel'* (1973)

Having analyzed the ways jeans were conceptualized in the public discourse of late Soviet Kazakhstan, it can be noticed that the critique of their consumption offers a useful lens for exploring the frames of Soviet identity by late socialism. Jeans figured in visual stories recounting the problems of Soviet youth westernization, its appropriation of loose mores and unrestrained social conduct, the dissociation from historical roots, as a reflection of privileged consumption and parasitic lifestyle, and an object of manipulation by Western capitalist companies. On the one hand, this portrayal aimed to demonstrate the damaging impact of Western culture's penetration into Soviet society, and how it undermined the harmony of its existence. In this way, things were shown

as dangerous vehicles of Western lifestyle with its false consciousness and promotion of morally 'rotten' values. However, as the other side of the coin, these sketches also shed light on the internal ills characterizing the society of late socialism. Excessive interest in Western products and thingism, or obsession with things more generally, indicated young people's lack of ideological discernment, and as a consequence, succumbence to the manipulations of the capitalist forces (Chernyshova 2013). Furthermore, conspicuous consumption and young people's parasitic existence raised the issues of social inequalities and disinterest in productive work.

While interaction with Western forms of modernity could hardly be totally restricted, since the continuation of Khrushchev's turn towards the Soviet Union's opening and internationalization ensured the proliferation of global popular culture into the Soviet society, where the image of a Soviet citizen as a modern person was crucial in maintaining the international prestige of the Soviet system (Chernyshova 2017), this foreign-looking modernity became seen as a challenge to the Soviet system's authority over the values and identity of its youth. In other words, the problem was that the Soviet citizens, especially the young ones, became modern consumers, but in the process, they shed their Soviet identity. What stood as the opposite to their adoption of Westernized loose behavior and primitive thinking, encapsulated in their animalistic portrayal, was the image of their 'lost' Sovietness, portrayed in a rather conservative framework. Mirroring the parasitic and Western-looking youngsters were images and figures embodying traditional values, including hard-work, cultured and modest conduct, simplicity of clothes and therefore lack of philistinism, as well as one's appreciation for and embeddedness in 'proper' Soviet national identity. The need for regulation of Soviet people's attitude towards Western things thus took the form of moral 'reminders' about what constituted authentic meaning: Westernized modernity should not overpower one's fundamental adherence to the Soviet way of life.

3.4. Jeans stories: personal meanings of consumption

Jeans and specifically, their Western identity is often the trope taken in discussing their 'political'-ideological agency in the Soviet context. Indeed, the explicitly negative representation of Western jeans in Soviet propagandistic content illustrated the dominant discourse of suspicious attitude towards the infiltration of Western culture's products in Soviet society. However, such a lens offers only one of the ways of looking at the socio-cultural phenomenon of Western jeans and their Soviet lives. This part of the thesis aims to explore the locally contextualized impact of jeans consumption in late Soviet Kazakhstan, the reasons for and impact of their interaction with the local youth.

Webs of access

Jeans were habitually described as a hard-to-get item, yet also as one of the characteristic features of youth culture in the late Soviet Union. This reflects the peculiar system of consumption during that period, which included a variety of potential sources for one's acquisition of a desired product. Thus, jeans were simultaneously a 'deficit' commodity, but also an object that could potentially be acquired through different channels, most of which, however, were unofficial or semi-official ways. Based on the information obtained from interviews and biographical sources, 3 major channels of access will be presented below: local fartsovshiki, personal connections, and individual trips.

Fartsovshiki

Fartsovshiki, or black marketers, represented an unambiguously clandestine and officially criticized and illegal source of economic relations in the Soviet Union. However, in practice, due to the persistent problem of material goods shortages in the official system of retail, their services became a social norm of late socialism. Describing the people who were involved in fartsovka

trade in the context of this research, the following factors can be pointed out. Firstly, fartsovshiki's professional identity could serve additionally to their 'public' roles, such as taxi drivers, trade employees, military personnel, but also fellow students, engineers, doctors, etc. As a generally unfavorable social category, among them it seems that Romani people (gypsies) were the least liked type of fartsovshiki. The potential or fraudulent purchases in the case of these traders was further worsened by their nomadic lifestyle. As respondent Raikhan Kaliyeva (Ekibastuz) noted, one could purchase jeans with defects, and it was virtually impossible to catch the trader afterwards, since they usually shifted the geography of their activity.

Black marketers, described in Bayanov's (2005) autobiographical book *Alma Ata Neformalnaya* appear to have been on the opposite end of gypsies' marginal social position. Although his account suffers from limitations inherent in all retrospective representations, throughout the book, Bayanov describes the fartsovshiki of Alma Ata as an essential part of the city's social eco-system, associated with specific locations of their underground activity. Thus, for example, he recalls hip cafes, restaurants, hotels, and bars as the primary places of their habitat. Bayanov (2005, p.15) gives particular emphasis to the variegated public that frequented these locations: fartsovshiks, prostitutes, KGB agents, foreigners, etc. In his view, such eccentric combination was possible due to the black marketers' bribing of security agents, and as he later claims to have found out, the double role of some fartsovshiki, who were also working as KGB's secret service agents.

In describing the specificities of using fartsovshiki's services, several respondents noted the importance of knowing the 'right' people who engaged in the so-called speculative activity. The reason for this, as they explained, was related to the potential of being cheated: "It did not work randomly, otherwise it would have been a total scam" (Respondent Yakov Geller,

Karaganda). One of such commonly repeated scenarios that can remind one of an urban legend, was the purchase of half-paired jeans. This 'horror' story surfaced across virtually each interview: an unknowing person went to purchase a pair of Western jeans from street fartsovshik either at a market or at a specific trading spot, and because of the scaremongering by the latter, ended up not verifying the quality of the item in full size, which upon reaching home resulted in a realization of having bought a cut-down half of original jeans. It is interesting that none of the interviewees had a first-hand experience of such trickery, yet this story was used by some of their friends and relatives in cautioning them against buying jeans from random black marketers. Another, less easy to detect, yet also anxiety-inducing type of fraud was the danger of purchasing fake Western jeans. Western brand or as it was called '*leibl*' or *'firma'*, played a crucial part in the appeal of jeans for Soviet youth, which in turn, could sometimes be manipulated by Soviet suppliers (Chernyshova 2017). Following respondent T's account, the lure of selling branded jeans at high price led certain fatsvoshiki to use old or Soviet-made jeans, dye them and change the label into imported ones, consequently selling them more expensively.

The need to know the person could have been essential for both sides, since fartsovshiki were also cautious about whom to trade with. A respondent from the then closed city Baikonur, Sultan Galiyev, in recounting the kind of people who used to sell deficit goods, including jeans, said: "They traded only with people they knew well" (*svoim khoroshim znakomim*). Identification of '*svoi'*, according to another interviewee could also imply a status meaning. When asked about the ways one interacted with underground traders, she noted that at her work place, a person could be approached and offered clothes to purchase, if he or she was known to have money, and by the looks of wearing quality clothes. The circle of *svoi* in her case, included certain colleagues who brought deficit clothes for sale, and primarily doctors, who had the status to afford them, while

mostly excluding lower medical personnel, whose salaries and purchasing capacity was much lower.

The co-existence of an illegal market system of fartsovka and the 'Soviet' values of its users could be traced in a number of interviews. As such, despite their choice of using the services of underground traders, these respondents expressed explicit dislike of farstovshiki, an attitude they claimed to be common among others as well. Calling them speculators (*spekulianty*) and *saudager* (trader) in Kazakh, the respondents explained their negative attitude towards fartsovshiki as part of the traditionally unrespectable image of 'usurer' (*rostovshchik/protsenshchik*). In a more immediate context, as respondent Galiyev (Baikonur) explained, this perception was worsened by the fact that fartsovshiki intentionally made profit on people's needs. According to him, the black marketers usually went to Moscow or Leningrad to purchase deficit imported products, and later re-sell them at a much higher price. Indeed, as several interviewees pointed out, imported jeans were quite expensive for an ordinary person, costing up to 250 rubles, and in Karaganda even by early 80s they were not a common phenomenon.

Similar moral criticism of fartsovshiks can be traced in the recollections of Yurchak's respondents. In their accounts, having to deal with black marketers had a discomforting feeling to it, as the latter behaved in an overly materialistic way, showing excessive interest simply in 'things' and the profit that they could make off them (Yurchak 2006, p.274). In general, trying to find other methods of obtaining the much-desired jeans, these people tended to opt for personal connections to access jeans. Without denigrating the unpleasant quality of having to deal with black marketers, such negative perception of materialism among the respondents also brings up the role of Soviet values in shaping people's attitudes towards material things. Echoing Stalin's ideas of cultured consumption (Hessler 2004; Fitzpatrick 2000), these respondents, despite their particular interest

in things non-Soviet, still adhered to such socialist values as the 'civilized' way and non-materialistic essence of such purchases.

Figure 6. Youth and jeans in Soviet Almaty. A family photograph dating from late 1970s- early 1980s capturing a young Kazakh family couple, the man is wearing jeans that he acquired from a fartsovshik in Leningrad. Source: Sultan Galiyev [pseudonym], personal interview 25 Feb. 2023.

Personal connections

The importance of one's social capital, that is having useful personal connections with those, who could provide access to deficit goods represented another major source for obtaining jeans. Analyzing the chronology of jeans culture in the Soviet Union, Chernyshova (2017) points out that during the 1960s, at the earlier stages of jeans proliferation, they were worn primarily by members of the cultural elite. A respondent Saken Abenov (Alma Ata) expressed skepticism about the existence of jeans culture even in the republican capital city due to the peripheral position of Kazakh SSR. Even though the jeans in the 1960s were quite rare indeed, and not necessarily in the 'peripheries' only (Chernyshova 2017), the respondent's father, as a privileged party functionary, acquired jeans for his son already during that early period. The importance of belonging to one of the elite groups of the Soviet party-state could play a significant role in the accessibility of jeans. This connection between status and consumption can also be traced in Bakhyt Kenzheyev's (Sosna 2021) recollections about the material benefits enjoyed by most of his schoolmates in the 1960s. Studying at one the prestigious English language schools in Moscow, Kenzheyev felt inferior, because unlike his classmates who belonged to 'elite' families, he "[…] did not have American jeans and sandwiches with black caviar" (Sosna 2021).

The pre-condition of being a member of elite families in order to have jeans began to shift in the 1970s. Personal connections remained a practical advantage, yet the social belonging of those who had access to imported jeans became more diverse. According to the interviews, it was usually those who had appropriate networks that were reported to be local pioneer jeans owners: "Jeans did not reach the stores. At the warehouse (*baza*) they were immediately sorted through for the privileged ones [*blatniye*]". The use of the term *blatnyie* by one of the respondents referred to the specific social phenomenon of blat. To use Alena Ledeneva's explanation, blat can be

understood as “the use of personal networks and informational contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures” (Zhuk, 2010, p.72). Abdrakhmanova (2017, p.63) in her research on the peculiarities of public consumption in the everyday life of Central Kazakhstan in 1950-70s also points out that the majority of consumer goods did not make it to the designated stores, and were distributed among ‘*svoi’* people at the warehouse level, with some of these products ultimately ending up at rag fairs for prices 10 times higher than their official ones.

One of the most frequent types of blat connections mentioned by the respondents of this project was having relatives in the trade-related sector. Commenting on their first pair of jeans, respondents Yakov Geller and Sholpan Tulepova (both from Karaganda) shared that they were able to obtain jeans at quite an early age, studying in 7 – 8th forms, because Yakov’s aunt worked as deputy director at one of the city’s major textile factories, while Sholpan’s sister-in-law worked at the local warehouse. The privilege of having relatives in the sphere of trade was also mentioned by other participants, who recounted that during their childhood years of late 1970s, it was usually the children of trade employees, who were those still rare owners of jeans. Abdrakhmanova (2017) similarly demonstrates how the use of blat played an essential part in people’s abilities to obtain desired goods. The latter could consist of both imported, higher quality, and more aesthetically appealing products, but also included ‘simpler’ items of necessity, such as boneless meat and canned goods. Most of the interviewees whom she cited, pointed out their desire to obtain imported items of clothing, one of them reminiscing: “Since we did not have any acquaintances in the trade sector, we had to get by with having ordinary things. But I especially craved for imported stuff” (Abdrakhmanova 2017, p.63).

The source of personal connections for obtaining jeans, however, was not limited to the blat and trade sector only. Respondent Raikhan Kaliyeva (Ekibastuz), for example, was able to purchase her first jeans in early 1980s from her brother's friend, who served in Mongolia. Upon his return from his military duty there, he brought several pairs of jeans for sale, one of which more or less suited her size, and she bought them for 60 rubles. Living in the village, she became one of the two only people who had jeans, the other person being the *sovkhoz* director's daughter. Later, as a trade employee in the regional center's *univermag*, she was also able to use her position to acquire a few pairs of jeans for her siblings. Those jeans, as she reports, were the first ones to have been officially allocated to their store, and their limited amount encouraged her to 'save' them for her brothers.

Working in the sphere of the military, having the opportunity to serve abroad, and therefore acquire deficit goods was also mentioned by other respondents. Respondent Aliya Kassymova (Tselinograd) recounted her service years in Afghanistan working as a nurse, and consequently having special access to the Soviet closed cheque stores located there. Already during her first year in Kabul in 1985, she purchased gifts for her relatives: "high quality clothes, […] Wrangler jeans, Coke, and candies", which she sent back to her family through a co-worker who was returning to the Soviet Union. Natalya Chernyshova (2017, p.160) perfectly captured this paradox of the Soviet-Afghan War, as the strain in the Soviet-American relationships caused by it was accompanied by "an influx of ready-made foreign jeans". As members of the Soviet army serving abroad, '*afgantsi'*, a term used for Soviet people serving in Afghanistan, had the privilege of purchasing deficit imported goods in the specially designated for them Soviet cheque stores.

Figure 7. Shopping for jeans in Afghanistan: Soviet people serving during the Afghan War. The interview respondent on the right side shared her story of purchasing Western goods, including brand jeans, for her relatives while serving in Afghanistan using locally established closed access cheque stores. Source: Aliya Kassymova [pseudonym], personal interview 5 August 2022.

Assessing the role of personal connections in one's experience of jeans culture in Soviet Kazakhstan during late socialism, it can be seen that there was a certain 'democratization' of privileged consumption in late 1970-80s. It was not only the traditional Stalinist-style nomenklatura and intelligentsia that enjoyed privileged access to deficit goods, but also employees in the sphere of trade, military, and other Soviet citizens who served abroad. The presence of such institutionalized exceptional access, however, also implied the continuation of distinction and

status in Soviet society. Thus, as several respondents emphasized, jeans, if they did not somehow belong to the system of blat, were an expensive item on the black market, costing between 150-250 rubles – a price that a regular Soviet person from 'simple' family could not afford, or potentially chose not to afford. For these families, it was mostly the day-to-day necessities that constituted the major part of their expenditures.

Travel

Professional and touristic trips created another opportunity to obtain 'deficit' things, yet as virtually all respondents emphasized, these were quite rare for ordinary Soviet people. As it was noted earlier, the pre-conditions of being a trade union and party member, having good recommendations and connections, as well as a substantial amount of money that one had to pay for the touristic trip complicated the chances of one's personal acquaintance with *'zagranitsa'*. However, it was not only travel to socialist bloc countries that was virtually unattainable, as even Moscow and Leningrad were reported to be out of reach and 'dreams' for most respondents. Thus, when asked about past travel destinations, one respondent from Western Kazakhstan's regional center emotionally shared that among her high school peers even Alma Ata was seen as 'abroad', and one could not dream of going to Moscow.

Only a few interviewees mentioned traveling to Moscow or Leningrad, and using this opportunity to purchase deficit goods, including jeans. Respondent Sultan Galiyev, used a work trip to Leningrad in 1978 to purchase his first pair of jeans from Karetnyi Dvor black marketers, despite multiple warnings about street fartsovshiki being scammers. He made a particular emphasis on his disadvantaged position compared to local traders. While the latter, in case of being caught, would know where to hide, he was an outsider to this city. Respondent Bolat Shaimerdin similarly acquired his first 'original' jeans in the Soviet metropole city in 1985. Having finished his army

service in Moscow, he used the self-earned money to purchase his first pair of Rifle jeans in Detskiy mir. His way of obtaining jeans, however, seems to have been much less risky and stressful, because by 1985, as the respondent notes, jeans were not rare, and he was able to buy them in an official store. In addition to private consumption, Moscow and Leningrad served as arteries for further spread of imported goods through republican fartsovshiki. Respondent Sholpan Tulepova mentioned her fartsovshik brother, who constantly moved between Leningrad and Karaganda, bringing 'stuff' (*manatki*) and selling it to local consumers.

Respondent Aliya Kassymova (Tselinograd) also purchased her first 'authentic' jeans during the trip - in her case, to Bulgaria. Recalling her youth years, Aliya noted the difficulty of purchasing 'real' jeans in her hometown, because the city was rather small and underdeveloped. The type of jeans that were available to her prior to the trip were *'samopaly'*, a product of Soviet underground manufacturers imitating Western jeans. Her touristic trip to Bulgaria, however, opened doors for accessing a foreign currency shop, where she was able to obtain 'original' Wrangler jeans. Aliya Kassymova's story demonstrates a fascinating embodiment of the authorities' anxieties about the dangers of Soviet citizens traveling abroad. Having received the opportunity to visit Bulgaria due to her trade union (*profsoyuz*) recommendations, like many other ordinary Soviet tourists, she had to declare her possessions before leaving the Soviet Union, including the jewelry she brought with herself. Not having any foreign currency, she, however, wanted to seize the chance of visiting Sofia, a city that had not only stores trading in local currency, but also foreign-currency shops with assortment of imported Western goods. Despite her fellow traveler's precautions about potential KGB's surveillance, Aliya persuaded her to visit the store during the lunch break 'just to look'. Inside the shop, which the interviewee described as the paradise of unseen before kind of abundance of high-quality imported things, she noticed a few

foreigners, one of whom approached her and offered dollar banknotes for her gold chrysoberyl earrings. Since she was wary about the consequences of engaging in foreign currency transactions, Aliya decided to choose things that she wanted, making the foreigner purchase them in exchange for her jewelry. As a result of this 'barter', the respondent traded her earrings and a ring for 3 pairs of microvelvet 'authentic' Wrangler jeans. Similar stories of Soviet tourists demonstrating 'improper' behavior by trading with foreigners, using gold, vodka, caviar, and other Soviet products, can be traced in archival documents related to the issue of Soviet people's conduct abroad. (APP, f. 708, op. 46, d. 93, pp.126-127).

Trips to the Soviet 'metropole' international cities and the system of tourism developed between the socialist countries thus allowed people from the more peripheral areas of the Soviet Union to access desired deficit goods. These stories illustrate the existence of multiple potential sources for acquiring imported products during the Brezhnev era, yet they also suggest the continuation of the hierarchy of consumption in the socialist world (Osokina 2001). First of all, this was reflected in the special treatment that was officially endorsed to such Soviet metropole cities as Moscow and Leningrad. Moscow, as the capital of the Soviet Union, enjoyed a far greater access to both 'official' and underground ways of obtaining imported products. Chernyshova (2017, p.117) quotes respondent Slavkin, sharing his memory of 1970s 'perks' of détente – having Western cultural and material goods occasionally 'thrown out' (*vykinut'*) for the general public. Moscow also figures as the source of desired imported products in Andrey Mikhailov's (2021) recollections of his childhood years in late 1960s. Most of the German imported goods, as he notes, were allocated to Moscow and Leningrad stores, with his hometown Alma Ata receiving only a tiny portion of these things. Secondly, traveling as a tourist both abroad and to the Soviet metropole, as the respondents consistently emphasized, was mostly unavailable for ordinary

people. It was both one's status, personal connections and the financial capacity to pay a certain portion of the trip's price that were critical in determining one's chance of traveling and accessing new 'markets'. While eventually most of the respondents were able to travel and purchase the desired things, for some it took more time to do so.

3.5. Individual meanings

'Imaginary' West

The Soviet authorities' efforts at anti-Western propaganda paradoxically often led to further development of popular fascination with Western materiality. Movies in particular were critical in promoting young people's interest in Western lifestyle. Respondents Saken Abenov (Alma Ata) and Bolat Shaimerdin (Karaganda) noted how instead of generating planned moral conclusions about the vices of Western capitalist societies, watching Soviet propaganda movies captured their imagination with colorful and alluring images of Western products. Recollecting one of his childhood's favorite movies "Dear Boy" (*Dorogoy mal'chik),* Bolat (Karaganda) shared how seeing such elements of Western everyday life as advertising billboards, beautiful cars, bottled drinks, crafted packages, etc., enchanted his imagination with new images: "We watch it with our eyes, but cannot touch". Anne Gorsuch made a similar observation about the unexpected visual effect of Soviet films displaying the moral disintegration of Western societies. Analyzing the effects of Soviet-Cuban ideological movie *I am Cuba (1964)*, she concludes that instead of bringing up feelings of appreciation of the socialist system against pre-revolutionary Cuba's association with immoral colonialist America, the movie critics pointed out the "seductive, decadent (and marvelously photogenic) world of Batista's Cuba" (Gorsuch 2010, p.170). The visual appeal of Western materiality is also described in the autobiographical work by Bektas Akhmetov (2006). In one of the memories from his youth of late 1960s, he recollects his brother's

habit of reading “America”, a US magazine that was allowed for sale in the USSR based on the mutual agreement between the two countries. One particular image of an American family in Arkansas became a source of ironic jokes between the two of them. The story shared details and pictures of their everyday life, as the author recounted: “tractors, house, children, wife, farmer himself wearing jeans, plaid shirt”. The part of the magazine’s story that impressed them the most, however, was the image and description of ‘hefty breakfast’ that the family enjoyed, making them compare their ratio against ‘imaginary’ American.

What these stories of ideological propaganda’s double-sidedness indicate is the largely imaginative function of Western culture’s popularity in the Soviet context. Yurchak (2006) uses the term “imaginary West” to explain the peculiarity of Soviet youth’s fascination with Western material and cultural products. He offers the following lose definition of the term: “the forms of knowledge and aesthetics associated with the “West,” but not necessarily referring to any “real” West, and that also contributed to “deterritorializing” the world of everyday socialism from within” (Yurchak 2006, p.52). Products of Western culture thus served as conduits that enabled one to experience travel, explorations and self-expression in constructed imaginary spaces of otherness. Bayanov (2005, p.74), for example, in describing the phenomenon of Beatlemania in Alma Ata of late 1960s-70s mentions how George Harrison’s appearance on the covers of Abbey Road album, wearing jeans, informed local youth’s fashion trends. The lack of anti-Soviet nature of Western consumption among local kids was also implied in respondent Yakov Geller’s (Karaganda) explanation of the Beatles appeal. According to him, rock music offered a fresh alternative to the traditional ‘classical’ songs that were officially promoted on Soviet stages. Young people’s desire to express their shared personal interests, however, was usually condemned as a manifestation of ideological faultiness.

Prestige and Soviet coolness

The quality of prestige born out of having jeans is well encapsulated in one of the respondents' characterizations: "If you were wearing jeans, people looked at you differently". Being an item of deficit, jeans, as it was mentioned earlier, were a rare phenomenon in Soviet Kazakhstan up until mid 1980s. Wearing jeans thus, as the interviewees noted, made one stand out, and elevated to the status of 'coolness'. The idea of being 'cool' had a rather ambiguous set of meanings. On the one hand, it designated social belonging to the privileged groups, with the corresponding special access to consumer goods. As such, respondent Bolat Shaimerdin (Karaganda) noticed how even if jeans were slowly appearing among local students, children from elite families of "fathers of nations", who studied mostly at economic and law faculties, "looked and smelled" differently. Constituting a separate caste, in his words, these young people wore fashionable and deficit clothes. This visual distinction, according to him, was part of such families' attempts to distinguish and preserve the exclusivity of their circle.

Natalya Chernyshova (2017, p.165) similarly points out how the specific choice of 'real' branded jeans, particularly Levi's, constituted a distinguishing feature of Muscovite "educated, urban middle-classes with material aspirations". The earlier mentioned satirical cartoon from *Shmel'* illustrated well this phenomenon of privilege and class being translated into the conspicuous consumption and 'free' opportunities enjoyed by the children of local 'elites'. For some respondents, who came from the sovkhoz background, jeans, however, were tied to a more localized identity of an urban person (*gorodskiye*). Informant Raikhan Kaliyeva (Ekibastuz) who lived in a sovkhoz and worked in a small district center (*rayonnyi tsentr)* noticed how it was women visiting from cities who could be seen wearing jeans. The special status attributed to wearing jeans in other words was partially derived from it being a 'deficit' commodity, available

primarily to the privileged groups of Soviet society. The relative understanding of privilege and access, in turn, could differ depending on one's position within the hierarchy of access to consumer goods.

The 'coolness' of jeans, however, also had a more physical and gendered aspect to it. As part of youth culture, having jeans signified that a person was fashionable and modern, which added to one's external image and perceived attractiveness. Commenting on the social role of jeans, respondent Saken Abenov (Alma Ata) shared that "during student evening socials, if the girl was in jeans, everyone tried to hit on her". Discotheques, denim and special attention was also mentioned by respondent Sholpan Tulepova (Karaganda), who recollected how people "noticed you" when as in her case, she was sporting a denim shirt Montana. In addition to the symbolic value of being fashionable, jeans also reportedly, were a type of garment that allowed one's figure/shape appear in a better way. Thus, as several respondents noted, jeans were an aesthetically good-looking garment, and they managed to accentuate one's stature. The garment-specific qualities of jeans that included such features as blue color, 'hardness' of the material that made them stand on one's body (*"stoyali")*, differentiated them from other clothes, and made the experience of wearing them special and enjoyable (Respondent Ayim Baikenova, Alma Ata).

The attractiveness of jeans in a way consisted in their otherness to the ordinary Soviet clothes. Such product-bound meanings of jeans suggest the agency of this object in co-producing the particular culture and experience of being young during late socialism. The cultural hybridity produced through the infiltration of Western culture's products was also reflected in the very presence of physical spaces designated for 'controlled' youth leisure. Soviet discotheques, mentioned by the respondents as the places of 'courtship' and demonstrations of one's image, as

Sergey Zhuk (2010) demonstrated in his history of youth Westernization in Dnipropetrovsk, were also a product of Western culture's adaptation to the Soviet context.

Figure 8. Following the trends. Young couple on the right side with their friends at Medeo, Alma Ata. The respondent, wearing red leather jacket and Western jeans, recounted how the latter accentuated one's figure in a beautiful way. Source: Ayim Baikenova [pseudonym], personal interview 10 October, 2022.

3.6. The ‘bricolage’ of Soviet identity in late socialism

The ‘forbidden fruit’ metaphor used by respondent Bolat Shaimerdin (Karaganda) in explaining the allure of jeans for Soviet youth in a way echoes Arjun Appadurai’s (1986, p.25) term ‘enclaved’ commodity. In his theory of the social of things, Appadurai offers an interpretation of material objects similar to that of Michel de Certeau (1984). Thus, according to Appadurai (1986, p.17), “the flow of commodities in any given situation is a shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and competitively inspired diversions”. Enclaved commodities, or material objects whose commoditization is kept under control, thereby ensuring its limited mobility and exclusivity, he suggests, are bound to diversions, meaning that entrepreneurial individuals will divert the enclosed paths of such objects and re-introduce them into the sphere of commoditization (p.25). While in the case of Western jeans in the Soviet context, the former was not a completely forbidden fruit, but rather a fruit hanging on the branch of ambiguity, still its ideologically negative connotation and limited accessibility did in a way make it a type of enclaved commodity.

Tracing the history of jeans consumption within the society of late socialist Kazakhstan it becomes clear that despite the public discourse rhetoric pursuing a moralizing message of Western consumption and philistinism, and the authorities’ efforts to control illegal ways of purchasing Western things, local youth actively engaged in diverse tactics of obtaining jeans. However limited, travel and internal Soviet mobility still offered opportunities for accessing the desired product. For some, it resulted in a first-hand purchase, for others it was either connections with those who had special access, or local black marketers, themselves often transporting things from Soviet metropole cities Moscow and Leningrad. While such diversity of purchasing channels, most of which went against the legal rules, does suggest a greater autonomy of economic activity and

choices of Soviet people by Brezhnev's period, one should not dismiss people's perceptions of and the actual efforts of state authorities in controlling illegal transactions and consumption of Western culture. The presence of state surveillance as a backdrop of one's ideologically ambiguous activity surfaced across several interviews. Respondents Raikhan Kaliyeva, Aliya Kassymova, and Sultan Galiyev, for example, mentioned their concerns about being caught while purchasing jeans, though the very opportunity of obtaining a deficit product seemed to have outweighed the fears of being punished. What this information suggests is that the respondents were aware of the ideologically questionable connotation of their choice to buy what many of them called '*zapreshenka'* (forbidden thing).

Analyzing the power of the appeal of jeans in overweighting people's fears of being caught or their scruples of partaking in a speculation and consumption of Western things it is essential to consider both the factors of jeans value in Soviet society, and the ways in which the respondents framed their consumption. First of all, the popularity of jeans was linked to its otherness. The difference translated in jeans identity was conditioned both by its non-Soviet, modern youth Western culture's association, but also due to its status of a deficit product that could signify its Soviet-based meanings of 'privilege' and 'cool'. The popularity and desirability of jeans, in other words, was not necessarily limited to one dimension of it being a product of Western culture's growing influence, but could also derive its emulative agency through more locally contextualized meanings of symbolic value. The relative nature of its popularity, where for rural residents, jeans could embody ideas of urban modernity and fashion, while for inhabitants of smaller cities, Western jeans could signify a specific social stratum of elite-access families and Alma Ata being the epitome of interest in fashion, the residents of Alma Ata themselves, positioned themselves against the modernity and 'cool' of the Soviet metropolitan cities, and the 'imaginary' West.

In addition to the symbolic value of status, the otherness of jeans also served in the practical everyday life sphere of youth culture of late socialism. Western jeans, and their non-Soviet materiality of sensation and visual appearance, made them an appealing accessory of enacting modern youth identity, which increasingly acquired a more Western-oriented form. Respondent Yakov Geller (Karaganda) captured well this phenomenon in his observation that the Soviet popular culture focused on offering hackneyed cliches about love, beauty and patriotism. Such preference for foreign consumption, in a paradoxical way, was partially a product of the Soviet authorities' attempts to curb youth Westernization through the popular culture propaganda of Soviet patriotic and moral values (Zhuk 2014; Gorsuch 2010), as well as the general conditions of Soviet-made consumer goods shortages, low quality and lack of fashionability (Gronow and Zhuravlev 2016). Thus, propagandistic stories and movies about 'rotten' West worked in a counterproductive way, generating 'enchantment' (Gell 1992) with Western culture and materiality.

Finally, a critical component of exploring the bricolage of jeans' meanings, following de Certeau (1984), one needs also to consider the frames of their usage by local consumers. As such, in quite an opposite to the image of Soviet propaganda, which focused on the parasitic character of Westernized youth consumption, most of the respondents emphasized their independent earning of money to purchase jeans. A particularly impressive and somewhat counter-logical story of acquiring Western jeans illustrates well the paradoxes of late socialism. Respondent Bolat Shaimerdin's sister, who lived in sovkhoz near Karaganda, worked extra-hard and overtime as a milkmaid, in order to collect the necessary sum for purchasing Texas jeans, that became available in local *sel'mag*. Not only did she have to obtain more milk, but also deliver it to another location outside of sovkhoz. The combination of such a Stakhanovite-like labor and the Western form of

desired reward demonstrates the fluidity and hybridity of late socialism everyday life and identity. Thus, on the one hand, her way of acquiring jeans characterizes her as a quintessentially Soviet productive person, yet looked from the other end, her motivation had a rather non-Soviet form. In this way the respondents emphasized their 'Soviet', that is, earned with honest labor, purchase of jeans, thereby differentiating themselves and justifying their actions as opposed to the 'parasitic' children from privileged families. From this angle, having jeans meant that one 'managed' to obtain them ("*znachit smog!*", Respondent Yakov Geller), whereby the focus shifted to the individual's effort and personal ingenuity.

The respondents' descriptions of the life cycle of their jeans also indicated the Sovietness of their usage. One of the commonly repeated features of jeans 'benefit' was their high quality, thick texture, and durability. So much so that the same pair of jeans could be worn by several generations, until they could not sustain any further repair and thus lost their usability (respondent Raikhan Kaliyeva, Ekibastuz). This phenomenon can surely be explained as part of the deficit economy (Chernyshova 2017), however, one can also notice how the framing of jeans consumption was presented through the Soviet 'rational choice' (Reid,2002) lens. Another curious and puzzling side to the usage of jeans was how contrary to the propaganda image, jeans ownership did not always translate into 'selfish' possession of social differentiation. Non-individualistic approach to the use of jeans surfaced in the stories of several respondents, who recounted how they shared their jeans with certain friends and relatives, when the latter were going out and needed a good-looking outfit. Clothes swapping was not unique to Soviet society, but the use of the non-thingist meaning of having 'cool' jeans, could have reflected the importance of being a part of youth culture, and the role of personal connections and mutual help in the everyday life of late socialism.

Concluding remarks

Natalya Chernyshova (2013) in her informative monograph on consumer culture during the Brezhnev era quotes Sheila Fitzpatrick's observation about the everyday life of Stalinist Russia of 1930s: "things mattered enormously in the Soviet Union in the 1930s for the simple reason that they were so hard to get" (Fitzpatrick 2000, p.40). Bringing her own perspective on the role of things and consumption in the Soviet Union some 30 years later, she notes that even though shortages continued to define the everyday experiences of Soviet people, their quality had changed. Instead of the Stalinist lack of things, it became the abundance of unwanted Soviet commodities during the Brezhnev era, which she characterizes as the sign of consumer culture in late Soviet Union – the presence of a modern selective and demanding consumer, who refused to go by with low quality unfashionable things.

Indeed, not simply things, but particular material objects became highly desirable among Soviet people of mature socialism, with Western jeans being one of the most iconic products of such a turn towards the phenomenon of consumer desire. This research aimed to explore the meanings of such socio-cultural changes from a so far understudied republican perspective of Soviet Kazakhstan. Delving into the local history of jeans consumption and its meanings several factors can be pointed out. Firstly, positioning the story of Western consumption from the experience of Soviet Kazakhstan in relation to the existing works on Western influence in the Soviet Union, such as Sergey Zhuk's perspective from the Ukrainian city Dniepropetrovsk (2010), and Alexey Yurchak's (2006) vision from the Soviet metropolitan city of Leningrad, it can be noticed that Kazakhstan had a rather peripheral position in its access to Western popular culture. Its spatial distance from the Soviet center and Western parts of the Union, though not a limitation for some, for the majority, however, represented an obstacle for cultural exchange with the West.

Secondly, following Sergey Zhuk's (2010) use of Michel de Certeau's (1984) theory of consumption meanings and everyday life in the context of Soviet Ukraine, this thesis supports the idea of consumers' subversive agency in adapting the dominant structures methods and discourses according to their needs. Having analyzed the role of jeans consumption in relation to the evolution of late Soviet identity in Kazakhstan, it can be noticed that the way local consumers framed their motivations and meanings of having and wearing jeans reflects their creative adaptation of both Western and Soviet influences. As such, Western material and popular culture products were used to experience cultural otherness - 'Imaginary West' (Yurchak 2006) that did not necessarily imply one's anti-Sovietness, but did suggest the lessening interest in mainstream Soviet popular culture - or, at least, its unintended, 'counterintuitive' effects. Local consumers also engaged in appropriating Western form into the framework of such 'Soviet' values as productivism, rational consumption, non-philistinism and lack of selfish individualism, by turning their interest in Western jeans into a form of Soviet practice. In other words, the public discourse language that was used to criticize excessive interest in Western goods was adopted to present one's consumption of jeans as 'properly' Soviet. Finally, by participating in commodity diversion through the underground purchases of jeans, the interviewees also challenged their marginal position in the chain of access and symbols of status. Understanding the popularity of jeans among the Soviet youth thus has to take into account not only the Western identity of jeans, but also the socially embedded meanings that they carried. Commenting on the use of consumption framework in analyzing socio-cultural changes more generally, this research wants to bring to attention the phenomenon of 'normalized' perception of inequality and stratification of late socialist society, which the respondents of this project mentioned casually in the course of the interviews.

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