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NATION IN TRANSFORMATION: TOURISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Peter Schofield and Agata Maccarrone-Eaglen

INTRODUCTION

After gaining independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic, a small Central Asian country (198, 500 km²) instigated democratic and economic reforms and established a reputation as a pro-Western, liberal economy, which attracted both the support of Western states anxious to establish a showcase of neo-liberalism in Russia's backyard and a steady flow of soft loans from international organisations. Democratisation and the adoption of market principles differentiated the state from its Central Asian neighbours: China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and like many independent states which emerged from the fragmentation of the Soviet federal structure, the Republic was eager to establish and articulate a national identity and statehood. One way in which such an identity has often sought expression under similar circumstances is through tourism (Hall, 1999) and the new Kyrgyz government soon recognised tourism's potential to achieve this goal.

Tourism is not exclusively a post-colonial phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan; during the period of Soviet occupation, health and sports tourism flourished as sanatoria developed at hot springs and lakes. There was some contraction of this industry over the 1990s because of the reduction in the size of the domestic market after independence, but

significant remnants of the Soviet era tourism industry regenerated because of demand from nearby states, Western Europe and the USA. Over the same period, other types of tourism, notably cultural tourism, grew as a result of this international interest. By 2001, the government had outlined its vision for the further development of tourism; ‘health and recreational tourism’ together with ‘cultural tourism’, ‘adventure tourism and mountaineering’ and ‘ecological tourism’ were identified as the country’s four main product-markets (KSATS, 2001). However, the Republic’s remote location, outdated political framework, complex economic legacy, social instability, poor infrastructure and outdated amenities and service standards have proved to be significant constraints on development.

Tourism is nevertheless high on the political agenda given the Republic’s natural assets and the industry’s potential to both generate foreign exchange earnings and facilitate the creation of a distinct image and identity for the state. The issue of Kyrgyz identity is complex; the country is torn between its traditional culture, Soviet patterns and Western influence, with deep divisions on the basis of ethnicity, religion and clan affiliation. Moreover, the economic disparity between the north and south of the country and between its rural and urban areas is fuelling social unrest, politico-religious extremism and an informal economy in which organised crime groups have formed a parallel authority structure. This chapter outlines the socio-cultural, economic and political factors in the transformation of the Republic and examines the issue of Kyrgyz identity and its relationship with tourism within this framework. The discussion focuses on cultural heritage tourism and the development of a collective identity within the

context of recent political events and the resurgence of both Kyrgyz nationalism and Turkic culture throughout Central Asia.

POST-COLONIAL REFORMATION AND POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the emergence of five independent Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) attracted the world's attention because of the area's strategic importance from a geo-political perspective. Subsequent political developments, particularly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the USA on 11 September 2001 served to focus that attention. Whilst Kyrgyzstan faced similar political and socio-economic issues to the other emerging CIS states, its development path was differentiated from the others on the basis of president Akayev's pro-Western democratic orientation (Starr, 1996). The adoption of a market economy was supported by financial aid from a number of international organisations, which was used to bolster its dysfunctional economy characterised by hyper-inflation, increasing shortages and widespread unemployment (Platt, 1994). Social and economic indicators placed the new republic in the range of low middle-income developing countries rather than the industrial reforming states, with over half of the national output and employment coming from agriculture despite the relatively small area of fertile land. Three-quarters of the state's food requirements were met by

imports and these problems were compounded by severe environmental pollution and poor infrastructural conditions (UNICEF/WHO, 1992).

Despite significant progress with respect to market-oriented reforms during the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan's economic growth was stymied by the lack of resources, the absence of processing infrastructure, inefficient state enterprises and widespread corruption in both the public and private sectors. Gross domestic product (GDP) plummeted and reached its lowest level in 1995 at about 55 percent of its 1991 level. However, by 1998, there had been a significant upturn in the economy and by 2001, the IMF were commending Kyrgyzstan's macroeconomic policy performance, although they also acknowledged that resolute implementation of the new economic programme was needed to enhance prospects for sustained growth and reduction in the state's 1.5 billion USD external debt (Europe-East, 2002). By 2004, the service sector's contribution to GDP was 32 percent, a combination of buoyant foreign trade, increasing tourist arrivals and small business taxes (Asian Development Outlook, 2005), but with the exception of a few high-profile projects like the Kumtor gold-mining complex, the economy remained heavily dependent on its agrarian sector (World Bank, 2006).

Theoretically, within the context of post-communist transition, the introduction of privatisation and the diversification of ownership in industrial and agricultural sectors should have created new organisational and social networks that mitigated the worst effects of ethnic, tribal or religious identities (Anderson, 2000). However, Kyrgyzstan experienced difficulties from the outset arising from the change in ideology, exacerbated by severe economic and social problems (Huskey, 1995; Anderson, 1999). The

Democratic Party, Republican Party and National Rebirth Party attempted to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the Communist Party, but it was the two pre-eminent clans, Salto and Saribagish, that dominated state politics. Whilst there was a tolerance of diversity that stems from the country's hospitable tradition, many interest groups, particularly in the south of the country, were not supportive of either democratisation or Akayev's policy of 'selling out to the West', reflecting the close links between Islam and the state (Lipset, 1994). Moreover, there were widespread misgivings about attempts to impose Western notions of a civil society, rooted in individual choice, on a country where group identities are more potent and there is a natural inclination to look for strong leadership within the community and state (Schofield, 2004).

The 'Tulip' Revolution in 2005 and the Continuing Crisis

Over the 1990s, president Akayev's liberal trajectory shifted to a more authoritarian position and the government failed to develop the rule of law or address the deepening socio-economic crisis. After a controversial extension to Akayev's presidential term in 2000, the Aksy riots in 2002 and continuing political unrest, the fraudulent parliamentary elections in February 2005 were the tipping point for the countrywide protests, fuelled by widespread poverty, increasing inequality and perceived corruption at local, regional and national levels. On 24 March 2005, the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan-led insurrection, culminated in a crowd of demonstrators seizing the Kyrgyz White House in Bishkek, the emancipation of opposition leader, Felix Kulov, who had been imprisoned in 2001, and president Akayev reportedly fleeing to Moscow. Following two months of

chaos and anarchy in Bishkek, an interim government consisting of an alliance between two veteran pro-Russian politicians, President Kermanbek Bakiyev and Prime Minister Felix Kulov (supported by the southern and northern political elites, respectively) was brokered by Moscow. It is interesting that both Bakiyev and Kulov depicted Russia as a history-ordained senior partner to Kyrgyzstan in their inaugural statements, but while Bakiyev endorsed Moscow's calls for an end to the American military presence in Kyrgyzstan, Kulov appeared to support the continuation of Akayev's policy of balancing among Russia, China, and the USA (Socor, 2005), reflecting the state's complex political identity.

Opinion among Kyrgyz citizens was divided on the events of 24 March 2005; some viewed it as a coup d'état, arguing that it disrupted the political order established by Akayev, whilst others believed that Kyrgyzstan experienced a revolutionary shift towards democracy, an open society and a legitimate state (Marat, 2006). However, one year later, there was a general consensus about concerns over the new government's unfulfilled promises and rising instability resulting from the rapid criminalization of Kyrgyzstan, widespread corruption in the public sector and the state's failure to introduce any visible economic reforms. There were open challenges to the government by criminal figures and widespread demonstrations and political skirmishes throughout 2006 and continuing political flux in 2007 with widespread criticism from both governmental and non-governmental sources (Marat, 2007). Marat (2008) has outlined the key changes in the political, economic and social landscape since the revolution whilst identifying elements which have remained unchanged over this period.

Key changes since 2005:

- Southern elites now occupy key government positions, breaking the hold on power established during the Soviet era.
- Many Russians have fled the country since the revolution, reflecting the feeling of growing insecurity among minority groups.
- The balance of power between state and non-state actors has shifted because at least 24 organised crime groups are active throughout the country and have formed a parallel authority structure.
- Mass mobilisation has been seen to be an effective tool to protest against an undemocratic government.

Features which remain unchanged:

- Widespread corruption still permeates all state structures.
- Deep inter-ethnic cleavages still persist.
- The government have failed to introduce economic reform and unemployment rates remain high.
- There is no encouragement of an independent mass media.
- The multi-vector policy, with a balance between Russia, China, and the US is still the main international strategy.

- Kyrgyzstan is still a politically, economically and socially unstable country.

One of the key priorities for the government is the introduction of viable economic policies to address unemployment and tackle poverty. This in turn, will strengthen civil society, help to alleviate inter-ethnic tensions and curtail the activities of criminal groups. However, overall economic performance will depend on how soon the state can achieve political stability. Meanwhile, although Kyrgyzstan has received three billion USD in foreign investments since 1993, the Republic remains one of the poorest countries in the world with 40 percent of the population living below the poverty line, approximately three quarters of whom live in rural areas (World Bank, 2006).

Regional, Ethnic and Clan Identity

Central Asia's ethnically based republics were carved from Turkestan by the Soviets after the 1917 revolution and there is no correspondence between their arbitrary borders, drawn up in the 1920s and 1930s, and the region's ethnic and linguistic situation. As a result, many border regions are the subject of international dispute. In southern Kyrgyzstan, the Osh, and Batken regions comprise pockets of Uzbek and Tajik territory, the city of Osh has a large population of ethnic Uzbeks and the border with Tajikistan is disputed territory. This conflict is paralleled by hostilities within Kyrgyzstan between religious, ethnic and clan groups at a number of different levels and geographic scales (Lipset, 1994).

The religious affiliation of the Kyrgyz population is primarily Muslim (83 percent) with 14 percent Russian Orthodox (UNDP, 1999), although they are generally less dogmatic in their religious beliefs than their Tajik and Uzbek neighbours, which reflects their nomadic heritage and the retention of many tribal traditions. Nevertheless, the southern provinces, where 30 percent of the population are Uzbek, are Islamic and were so even during the Soviet era. By comparison, the northern region, including Bishkek, is more Russified and liberal with a significant concentration of Slavs, which has tended to restrict ethnic Central Asian access to jobs, modern housing and social services (Huskey, 1995). This has increased inter-regional and inter-ethnic tensions and these north/south contradictions are widely regarded as the main destabilising factor in society.

A further complexity is the social significance of family and clan ties. Kyrgyz identity is closely aligned with membership in one of three clan groups which also have a regional orientation. In the north and west of the country, the 'Sol' or left wing consists of seven clans whilst in the south, there are two clan groups: the right wing or 'Ong' which contains one clan (the 'Adygine') and a second group, the 'Ichkilik', consisting of many clans, some of which are not of Kyrgyz origin (Anderson, 2000). Clan loyalties dominate life on both sides of the north/south divide and rivalry among clans has proved to be a significant barrier to the unification of Kyrgyzstan (Schofield, 2004).

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Given the Republic's physical terrain, the global growth in the tourism market and the

willingness of external financial institutions to fund tourism projects, it is not surprising that Kyrgyzstan has recognised the strategic potential of tourism in political, economic and social terms. The Kyrgyz tourism industry has survived the cumulative effects of three poor tourism seasons from 2001 to 2003 resulting from 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the outbreak of SARS (Table 1). Tourist arrivals have continued to grow, albeit erratically, with the exception of 1998, 1999 and 2005, the unreliability of official statistics notwithstanding. Prior to the revolution, the forecast for 2005 was approximately 1,000,000 and whilst its effect on inbound tourism flows from neighbouring CIS countries, particularly Kazakhstan, was minimal, the security concerns of western tourists took their toll. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, many of the largest new tourism projects, driven by the funding agendas of international development actors and the dependency of the government on external technical assistance, were delayed pending the outcome of an election. The tourism arrivals figure for 2005 was therefore higher than expected under the circumstances (only 18.5 percent down on the previous year) and reflects the success of marketing activities which targeted neighbouring countries in an effort to offset the decline in visitors from key markets in the USA, UK, France, Austria and Japan. The available figures for 2006 and 2007 together with the figure for 2008 and the official forecast for 2009 - 2 million visitors (Akipress, 2008) indicate that the sector has recovered and is continuing to grow. However, Kyrgyzstan has still not reached normalization and indications suggest that investors are hesitant and frustrated with the slow development of tourism over the past few years compared with its trajectory in the two years before the revolution.

TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

State policy makers have two overriding priorities for tourism. The first is to increase the tourism product's competitiveness to raise the per capita levels of foreign exchange earnings and the second is to enhance regional development by creating economic opportunities in some of the most underdeveloped areas of the Republic. A key aspect of the first priority is to develop the destination's brand image because awareness of the destination in Western tourism markets is poor and the country is, to a large extent, indistinguishable from other Central Asian states (Schofield, 2004). This under positioning has resulted from a number of factors including the lack of a strong political identity and the failure of the Kyrgyz State Agency for Tourism and Sport's (KSATS) promotion to differentiate the product from competitors because of the 'me-too' emphasis on scenic beauty. In 1993, the Kyrgyz Constitution set out the government's intention to position the country away from neighbouring CIS states on the basis of its democratic society and free market economy, to become 'Asia's Switzerland' (Haberstrok, 2000). The direct comparison with Switzerland created a distinctive external image both politically and in relation to its physical landscape, which proved to be beneficial from the perspective of international relations and foreign investment in the short term, but failed to address the issue of unification through a coherent Kyrgyz identity.

Culture, Ethnicity, Tourism and Identity

The new global economic order has had a profound effect on post-communist

Kyrgyzstan. Whilst the mining of rare metals including gold makes a significant contribution to GDP, the country's transformation has been driven by post-industrial activities associated with the increasingly sophisticated cultures of consumption. Within this context, there has been a growing recognition of the role of culture in framing and shaping the country's economy and society resulting in attempts to develop a cultural strategy for regeneration. A reaction to the imposition of national consciousness and collective culture during the Soviet era has encouraged the creation of a revised cultural identity linked to pre-communist heritage; this newly elected identity has been expressed with a heavy emphasis upon ethnicity and reflects self-expression and self-assertion as much as historical evidence (Thompson, Schofield, Foster and Bakieva, 2006).

Much of Kyrgyzstan's tourism development has hitherto focussed on the country's natural environment although the Republic's cultural heritage is beginning to emerge as a significant feature of the tourism product. Silk Road heritage has traditionally been a key element in the tourism portfolio, but other facets of Kyrgyz history and culture are now being harnessed to satisfy a number of important objectives not least, the creation of national identity and place brand equity. However, Kyrgyzstan's rich cultural heritage and ethnic diversity are both a blessing and blight. On the one hand, its rich cultural heritage is an important feature of the tourism product which augments the country's natural attractions. On the other hand, the post-Soviet awakening of ethnic and clan identity, particularly marked in the south of the country, militate against the development of a coherent national identity and in an attempt to establish a common vision, particular emphasis has been placed on those aspects of Kyrgyz heritage which are common to, and

recognised by, inhabitants of both southern and northern regions. These elements are the Manas epos and pastoral nomadism and both have emerged as core elements of the cultural tourism product, the latter as ‘Jailoo tourism’.

The Manas Epos

Archaeological evidence of settlements in Kyrgyzstan can be traced back 300,000 years, although it was not until the 16th century that the Kyrgyz people migrated to the land which is known today as Kyrgyzstan and not until the October Revolution of 1917 that they acquired a written language. The prolonged reliance on the oral method of passing on information led to a series of epic poems known as ‘epos’, which played a significant role in passing value systems from one generation to another. Among the 34 Kyrgyz epos which have been identified by the Turkish Language Institution, by far the longest (some 553,000 lines), best known and most enduring is the Manas epos. It tells of the life and death of Manas, the leader of the Kyrgyz tribes during the most successful period of their history when the Kyrgyz conquered Chinese Turkestan and won a great victory over the Uyghurs (Auezov, 1999). Not surprisingly, given Manas’ status in Kyrgyz cultural heritage, he became the central figure on which the Kyrgyz cultural identity was based. During the Soviet era, many of those responsible for research into the Manas epos were imprisoned, disappeared, or were shot. The epos was suppressed because of fears relating to pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic undercurrents which were considered to be damaging to the common, supranational Soviet culture (Paksoy, 1989).

Nationalism requires a shared sense of history whether it is based on fact or myth and much of the mythology behind modern forms of nationalism is militaristic. The Manas legend is typical in this respect although it is atypical in the sense that Manas is an important cultural icon for all Turkic peoples in Central Asia irrespective of their political or geographical affiliations (Musayev, 1994). However, Manas promotes the collective consciousness of the Kyrgyz nation and is an integral part of national identity only in Kyrgyzstan (Thompson et al, 2006). The strategic importance of Manas to the Republic's cultural and political identity is demonstrated by the fact that less than a year after gaining independence, President Akayev declared plans for the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the Manas epos in 1995, a largely extraneous date given the lack of clarity over the epos' exact period of origin. A key objective of the millennium celebrations was the promotion of national identity following cultural repression and their importance is reflected in the cost of the four day event which exceeded eight 8 million USD, equivalent to 710 USD per head of population (Mayhew, Plunkett and Richmond, 2000). Manas embodies the spiritual unity of the Kyrgyz, their democratic principles and their independence (Guttman, 1999) and is a potent symbol of the Republic, which underpins both Kyrgyz national identity and the country's cultural tourism product.

Emerging nations which are in the process of developing tourism products require strong and differentiated brands to improve their identity and imageability in order to position themselves effectively in the mind of prospective consumers. To this end, tourism promotional literature often draws on indigenous markers and cultural symbols to facilitate particular ways of seeing and interpreting a destination and not surprisingly,

given Manas' iconic status and contemporary relevance, Kyrgyzstan's official state promotional literature is no exception. This is an effective means of symbolising many of the Republic's post-Soviet Turkic and Kyrgyz values and characteristics whilst presenting a broader cultural tourism portfolio (over and above the Silk Road heritage) to the international marketplace (Thompson et al, 2006). It also represents a means of both positioning the brand away from its 'Switzerland in Central Asia' image and differentiating the tourism offer from competitors with similar natural resources and nomadic heritage. The Manas legend is rapidly becoming part of the Kyrgyz self image; its use in promotion is therefore as relevant to rekindling deep rooted Kyrgyz ethnic identities as it is to presenting a coherent image to external audiences and promoting the cultural tourism product.

Pastoral Nomadism, Jailoo Tourism and CBT

Before Soviet collectivisation, the Kyrgyz people were pastoral nomads and this tradition has been continued in the form of 'Jailoo' ('summer pasture') tourism which describes the seasonal practice of Kyrgyz families moving with their livestock to mountain pastures in the month of May. This nomadic heritage has been developed further into a tourism product which is popular with international visitors who want to experience the traditional Kyrgyz way of life and its customs. Visitors are able to stay with families in 'bozu' (yurts) and enjoy authentic Kyrgyz hospitality. This 'Shepherd's Life' product was developed through a joint venture between the Kyrgyz government and Helvetas, the Swiss Association for International Co-operation. The initiative provided training to residents in

rural locations and has helped to spread economic and social benefits into some of the more remote and poorest areas of the country thereby addressing one of the government's key priorities for tourism development.

Following this successful model, Helvetas has supported the development of other community based tourism (CBT) projects in poor rural areas. CBT is a form of 'for-profit' eco-tourism based on participatory stakeholder decision-making, local economic development, the provision of investment opportunities for local inhabitants and sustainable environmental practices. The CBT model is particularly important for Kyrgyzstan given the acute social problems and the sector's heavy dependence on the physical environment. There are 17 CBT groups together with a five-group association of shepherd families offering 'jailoo' (yurt-based) tourism throughout Kyrgyzstan. In January 2003, the CBT groups amalgamated and established their own Kyrgyz Community Based Tourism Association (KCBTA) and the 'Hospitality Kyrgyzstan' brand.

The objective of KCBTA is to improve living standards in remote rural areas by developing a sustainable ecotourism model that utilizes local resources (KCBTA, 2007). KCBTA is trying to achieve this through a pro-poor strategy that includes the development of CBT as a niche, the integration of CBT into the mainstream tourism industry and the development and implementation of policies conducive to rural CBT (Raeva, 2005). Overall, the CBT concept appears to be working well in rural areas where there are very few alternative sources of income, although progress is slow because of the lack of market orientation and entrepreneurial skills among local communities. CBT

income typically represents between 30 and 40 percent of total family income and is a viable means of redistributing tourism wealth from the dominant Bishkek-based tour operators to Kyrgyzstan's poor communities.

The development of CBT in Kyrgyzstan is illustrated in Table 2. There has been a steady increase since 2000 and although there was some decline in individual CBT group membership in 2005 after the revolution, this was offset by membership increases in other areas and three new CBT groups emerged. The net result was a 19 percent increase in membership. Compared with the 100 percent increase between 2003 and 2004, this suggests that the immediate effect of the political upheaval was to reduce the rate of CBT development rather than curtailing or reversing the upward trend. The figures for 2006 show that overall there was a 17 percent increase in CBT membership. Some individual CBT groups increased their membership, five new area groups were established, a few retained their 2005 figures whilst a number of areas declined. By comparison, in 2007 CBT membership decreased by nine percent. It is interesting to note that whilst many groups increased their membership and a few remained stable, others declined. Clearly, the political situation has affected CBT development overall, but its impact has been less than expected. The remoteness of many CBT group locations may have insulated them from the worst effects of the political events, although some southern groups such as Talas and Osh have experienced difficulty in recovering their pre-revolution trajectory and CBT Bokonbaevo appears to be in slow decline. This may reflect local politics and/or western market perceptions of risk associated with visiting southern regions despite the relative stability in the country overall.

TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

Table 3 shows that the number of tourists who visit CBT groups in Kyrgyzstan has increased significantly since 2000 and it is interesting that 5,122 tourists were received during 2005, an increase of 5 percent in comparison to 2004. Southern CBT groups did however experience a decrease in tourists, reflecting the CBT membership statistics, notably Jalalabad and Kazarman compared with CBT groups in the north and central areas for example, Karakol and Naryn. In 2006, CBT visitor numbers increased by just under 14 percent. Kochkor and especially Naryn continued to grow, Jalalabad, Karasuu, Arsalanbob and Osh significantly increased their visitor numbers and reversed the contraction experienced in 2005 and CBT Chong-Kemin and Alay were added to the portfolio. By comparison, visitor numbers fell at CBT Karakol and Shepherd's Life after increasing over 2005 and at CBT Tamchy, Kazarman and Talas, visitor numbers continued to decline. Interest in Kazarman and Talas was constrained because of the corresponding lack of available activities such as treks in these areas (KBTA, 2007). In 2007, visitor numbers grew by 33 percent and only CBT Karasuu experienced difficulties. Visitor numbers at the two CBT groups added in 2006 had increased exponentially and three further groups were in operation. The availability of organized tours and treks in the areas where CBT developments are situated is a significant influence on tourist arrivals.

TABLE 3 NEAR HERE

The negative impacts of political and economic change in transitional countries are often most significant in rural areas. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the results suggest that the CBT programme has helped to offset the worst effects of the political upheaval, particularly in relation to the revolution and its aftermath notwithstanding the significant levels of poverty in rural areas and the outmigration as a result. Nevertheless, there are regional variations; the negative image of the south, in terms of its political instability (particularly in and around Osh) and the attendant risks for visitors, may have been exacerbated at least in the short term by the events of 2005, although the KCBT (2008) report that interest in visiting southern regions is now increasing as is the overall number of international visitors to the Republic since 2005 including visitors to CBT groups. This may reflect the increased awareness of Kyrgyzstan in global markets through media coverage of the revolution. More locally, the CBT initiative and the ‘Hospitality Kyrgyzstan’ brand in particular have been an effective vehicle for the development of a distinctive rural identity which links directly with the cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz nomadic tradition.

Restructuring processes resulting from political and economic transformation often affect the role and identity of women (Weiner, 1997) and they are often less well positioned to take advantage of new economic opportunities under these conditions (Hall, 2004). Community involvement and ownership of tourism development for women has often been inhibited by the legacy of minimal experience of bottom-up initiatives and

lack of opportunity to participate in local decision-making because of the tradition of male dominance. The CBT initiative has addressed this issue and provided Kyrgyz women with employment opportunities and support for self-determination in order to ameliorate their identity, role and employment status (KCBTA, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The development of national identity can raise contradictions and tensions between the generation of a collective identity for a country's citizens (to inculcate a sense of pride and to forge domestic unity and common aspirations) and an acceptable image for the consumption of international tourists and investors (Hall, 2004). Kyrgyz identity is a complex issue which is underpinned by a range of factors at local, regional and national levels. The Republic is now beginning to emerge as a distinct socio-political entity, despite the heritage it shares with other newly-independent Central Asian states: Islamic faith, Turkic language and culture, deep-rooted clan loyalties, a pre-Soviet nomadic lifestyle and Marxist-Leninist rule. However, recent events have destabilised the basis of the Republic's differentiation from its neighbours: its commitment to democracy, free market economics and standing against Islamic fundamentalism. The challenge for Kyrgyzstan is to construct a national identity that is both socially and politically acceptable and ensure that its inter-regional enmity does not deteriorate into the kind of politics that are currently being witnessed in Tajikistan.

The government recognizes tourism's potential to integrate the Republic into the global economy and this sector is beginning to make a useful contribution to foreign

exchange earnings and the creation of employment opportunities not least through the development of CBT in rural areas. Furthermore, the development of the Kyrgyz state tourism product is providing an opportunity to forge a national identity and secure political re-imagining objectives to support the country's economic and social development goals. Within the context of tourism branding, cultural heritage is value laden; economic and political power have significantly influenced the selection and interpretation of the nation's history. The communist legacy is strongly dissonant with Kyrgyzstan's contemporary aspirations and this is reflected in the lack of emphasis on the country's communist past within the present tourism product and the selection of pre-Soviet historical icons such as Manas to both differentiate the brand and establish a distinct identity for the nation. This is helping the government to develop a clear, credible and sustainable position for the Republic in a tourism market characterised by increasing regional and international competition, product parity and substitutability.

There is no question that the tulip revolution liberated the nation from a corrupt, autocratic regime and restated the Republic's political identity. However, the events in 2005 and subsequently indicate that the country's problems won't be solved in the short term. A key question is whether or not Kyrgyzstan is ready for democratisation; the country's multi-ethnic identity and recent history have combined to demonstrate that the Republic is still torn between its traditional culture, Soviet legacy and Western influence. Clearly, the development of a modern civil society and a viable economy are important factors on the country's road to democracy. What is less clear is whether domestic interests or those of its Central Asian neighbours will permit the Republic to consolidate

its identity without which it will struggle to attract international attention and achieve its integration into world markets. Without political and economic stability, a strong legal system and the eradication of corruption, the prospects for international assistance and tourism development remain in the balance. The weight of evidence suggests that, in both political and tourism terms, the identity of this least known of the little known former Soviet Asian republics is likely to remain in a transitional state for the foreseeable future.

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Table 1: International Tourism Arrivals and Expenditure for Kyrgyzstan

Year	Arrivals	+/- (%)	Expenditure (KGS¹)	+/- (%)
1996	48,601	-	152,737,200	-
1997	87,386	+79.8%	258,198,600	+69.0%
1998	59,363	-32.7%	305,474,400	+18.3%
1999	48,272	-18.7%	512,760,600	+67.9%
2000	58,756	+21.7%	556,399,800	+8.5%
2001	98,558*	+67.7%	1,163,712,000 *	+109.2%
2002	139,589*	+41.6%	1,927,398,000 *	+65.6%
2003	341,990*	+144.9%	2,363,790,000 *	+22.6%
2004	737,500**	+115.6%	Data unavailable	-
2005	601,100**	-18.5%	Data unavailable	-
2006	1,500,000**	+149.5%	Data unavailable	-
2007	1,600,000**	+6.7%	12,426,262,200**	-
2008	1,895,000***	+18.4%	Data unavailable	-

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2005)/WTO (2006)*/
Akipress (2008)**/National Statistical Committee, State Agency for Tourism (2009)***
¹1 KGS = 0.02 USD

Table 2: KCBTA Membership

<i>CBT Groups</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
CBT Kochkor	14	41	38	30	32	32	32	32
CBT Naryn	15	21	22	12	15	13	15	15
CBT Jalalabat	9	18	20	20	11	13	20	25
CBT Arsalanbob	-	20	12	20	22	27	29	32
CBT Karasuu	-	25	20	11	20	23	23	23
CBT Karakol	-	24	15	18	17	20	17	18
CBT Kazarman	-	-	9	11	15	9	8	10
CBT Talas	-	-	-	14	43	17	16	13
CBT Osh	-	-	-	16	28	18	14	10
Shepherd's Life	-	-	-	-	101	101	91	93
CBT Tamchy	-	-	-	-	-	12	12	13
CBT Bokonbaevo	-	-	-	-	-	20	18	14
CBT Kyzyl-Oi	-	-	-	-	-	12	13	15
CBT Chong-Kemin	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9
CBT Alay (Gulcho)	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	13
CBT Sary-Mogul	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	15
CBT Batken	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	15
CBT Kerben	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	16
<i>Excluded Groups</i>								
CBT Kopuro-Bazar	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	-
CBT Aral	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	-
Total	38	149	140	152	304	362	419	381

Source: KCBTA (2007; 2008)

Table 3: CBT Visitor Numbers

<i>CBT Groups</i>	2004	2005	+/- (%)	2006	+/- (%)	2007	+/- (%)
CBT Kochkor	1164	1588	+36.4%	1675	+5.48%	1837	+9.7%
CBT Naryn	205	360	+75.6%	807	+124.17%	1146	+42.0%
CBT Karakol	264	473	+79.2%	373	-21.14%	779	+108.8%
CBT Tamchy	314	231	-36.4%	312	-35.06%	393	+25.9%
CBT Kazarman	134	75	-44.0%	69	-8.00%	134	+94.2%
CBT Jalalabad	864	269	-68.9%	346	+28.62%	426	+28.6%
CBT Karasuu	77	72	-6.5%	105	+45.83%	55	-47.6%
CBT Arsalanbob	687	545	-20.7%	830	+52.29%	998	+20.2%
CBT Talas	135	143	-8.3%	95	-33.57%	105	+10.5%
CBT Osh	232	217	-6.5%	365	+68.20%	584	+60.0%
Shepherd's Life	763	888	+16.4%	599	-32.55%	651	+8.7%
CBT Bokonbaevo	-	133	-	154	+15.79%	223	+44.8%
CBT Kyzyl-Oi	-	128	-	75	-41.41%	151	+101.3%
CBT Chong-Kemin	-	-	-	5	-	57	+1040.0%
CBT Alay (Gulcho)	-	-	-	1	-	52	+5100.0%
CBT Sary-Mogul	-	-	-	-	-	77	-
CBT Batken	-	-	-	-	-	6	-
CBT Kerben	-	-	-	-	-	73	-
Total	4860	5122	+5.4%	5812	+13.5%	7747	+33.2%

Source: KCBTA (2005; 2006; 2008)