

*Internationalist Aesthetics. China and Early Soviet Culture*, by Edward Tyerman, New York, Columbia University Press, Studies of the Harriman Institute of Columbia University, 2022, xi + 353 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography and sources, index, ISBN 978-0231199193

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In its examination of the complex cultural relations between the Soviet Union and China in the early Soviet years *Internationalist Aesthetics* ranges widely through politics, history, history of ideas, literature and culture, literary, linguistic and cultural theory, and draws upon a very large number of sources both contemporaneous and modern in all those disciplines. It uses many rare and inaccessible publications from the Soviet Far East. Its very great and rare distinction is to use both Russian and Chinese sources, a feat which adds considerably to the sophistication and depth of the analysis. It is a phenomenal intellectual achievement.

Central to the book's story is the role of the writer and theorist Sergei Tret' iakov. While *Internationalist Aesthetics* is in sustained dialogue with the work of such scholars as Elizabeth Papazian and Katerina Clark, the close attention throughout the volume to Tret' iakov's work in a number of genres (as travel writer, poet, playwright, potential film maker, experimental biographer and radical critic and theorist) confirms his seminal importance in these years. Among the book's many accomplishments is to provide the fullest yet study of this exemplary figure, both within the context of early Soviet literature and as a contributor to the increasingly perilous ideological debates of the period.

The book's Introduction provides enabling historical and political context while explaining that the book's central characters will be the translators and 'mediators' between Soviet leftist ideas and cultural practice and the Chinese citizens attracted to the Soviet revolution. Chapter 1 addresses the role of visitor-travel writers, concentrating on Tret' iakov and Boris Pil' niak as contrasting but overlapping figures, but ranging widely, paying attention, for example to the writings of Galina Serebriakova and Aleksandr Ivin. An illuminating open reading of the 'Pekin' section of Tret' iakov's *Chzhungo* is followed by a powerful close literary analysis of his poem 'Rychi Kitai!' ('Roar China!') and by a suggestive articulation of the differences and similarities between Tret' iakov's and Pil' niak's China texts. The chapter concludes by referring persuasively to the recurrent tension between authoritative Soviet perspectives and the need for collaboration and (mutual) mediation.

Chapter 2 considers stage productions. After examination of the context of the China cult on the European stage in the early twentieth century, two sample texts, Tret' iakov's play (also called) *Rychi, Kitai!* (Roar, China!) and the ballet *The Red Poppy* are considered in detail. There is absorbing material on the contradictory structure and reception of *Rychi, Kitai!* and its complex presentational strategies, drawing upon the domestication/foreignization debate in translation studies, while issues of language, translation, communication, and also of politics (colonialism, internationalism, revolutionary upheaval) remain central. On *The Red Poppy* the crucial initial question is how ballet could become Soviet. The issues at stake here are the different kinds of dance used in the ballet, the complex reception, including from Chinese viewers, and the 'multiply encoded' image of the red poppy itself, brilliantly examined in an intellectually coruscating final section.

Chapter 3 turns to Soviet cinematic engagements with China, examining the 'new spatial and temporal relationship between China and revolutionary Russia' (p. 143) that Soviet film-makers wanted to create and their desire to make both films about China and films to exhibit in China (in order to radicalise Chinese audiences). This chapter ranges widely, from the animated film *Kitai v ogne* (China in Flames) to Vladimir Shneiderov's 1925 expedition film *Velikii perelet* (The Great Flight), to Tret' iakov's own, unmade project with Eizenshtein and Tisse, *Dzhungo*, to the 1928 documentary *Shangkhaiskii dokument* (Shanghai Document) and Isaak Babel's script for the now lost film *Kitaiskaia mel'nitsa* (The Chinese Mill) in which humour undermines international solidarity.

Chapter 4 considers *Den Shi-khua*, Tret' iakov's extensive 'bio-interview' of one of his Chinese students, a work that evolved over a decade of new editions in the late 1920s and early 1930s, entailing the articulation and elaboration of a new theory of both writing and reading. This complex text requires a complex analysis, a task for which Tyerman is supremely well equipped. The book's epilogue takes the story further into the 1930s, through the work of the Chinese returnees from Moscow and, in Russia, through the journal *International Literature* and the contribution of two Chinese intermediaries, the poet and translator Xiao San (Emi Siao) and the Peking opera actor Mei Lanfang. It concludes with numbing details on the way in which the arrests and executions of the 1930s decimated the ranks of those involved in the political and cultural reception of the Chinese revolutionary movement.

*Internationalist Aesthetics* is a staggeringly erudite, formidably argued and fundamentally important book about which a great deal more could be written than I have space for here. Its case study of political and cultural exchange between nations provides a model for approaching such issues in other areas and epochs and is particularly relevant at the present time of political and cultural competition and the battles for influence.

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