

New Keywords for World Literature
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Abstracts for Day 2

Translating China into International Literature: Stalinist World Literature Beyond the West

Edward Tyerman (University of California, Berkeley)

This paper considers the Soviet world literature project of the Stalinist period through the prism of its flagship journal of international literature. Founded as *Herald of World Literature* in 1928, and briefly renamed *Literature of the World Revolution* (1930–32), from 1933 until 1943 this journal ran under the title of *International Literature*, with parallel editions in Russian, French, German, English, Spanish, and briefly Chinese. Discussions of the Russian edition of *International Literature* tend to emphasize its role as a conduit for Western literature into the USSR, including a significant number of modernist writers. Less attention has been paid, however, to the journal's coverage of countries outside the West. A glance through the pages of *International Literature* shows that China remained a constant focus of the journal's attention. From 1928 onwards, the journal hosted the first large-scale translation of modern Chinese literature into Russian, publishing works by Zhang Yiping, Ye Shengtao, Tai Jingnong, Mao Dun, Hu Lanqi, Rou Shi, Lu Xun, Ding Ling and Xiao Jun. Their texts appeared alongside articles on contemporary Chinese culture, the history of Chinese literature, and cultural politics in contemporary China. Tracing China's presence in *International Literature* thus allows us to observe how China was situated within the Soviet map of world literature that the journal produced for its readers. The modernist traces detectable in selections from the West were absent from the journal's mediation of China, which focused instead on making the USSR's eastern neighbour recognizably Soviet, drawing to some degree on the established frameworks of Soviet nationalities policy. My argument illustrates this process by focusing on the dynamics of translation in key publications of texts by Mao Dun and Lu Xun, and examining the translation strategies employed by the poet and cultural politician Emi Xiao (Xiao San 萧三), the journal's main contact with the Chinese literary scene.

Socialist Graphic Novels: Visualizing Soviet Literature in China

Nicolai Volland (Pennsylvania State University)

After the revolution of 1949, the young PRC embarked on a decade-long effort to “learn from the Soviet Union.” As part of this massive campaigns, hundreds of Soviet novels were translated into Chinese and printed in millions of copies. Much less known, however, are adaptations of these literary works into other genres, including film, theater, and especially graphic novels (*lianhuanhua*). This paper investigates Chinese graphic novels based on some of the most popular works of Soviet literature, arguing that the intersection of the transcultural and the transgenre played a key role in popularizing Soviet socialist realist literature in China. While graphic novels were all but unknown in Soviet Russia, the quintessentially Chinese genre of *lianhuanhua* was booming in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The emergence of graphic novel versions of the classics of socialist realism hence represents the marriage of foreign literary styles and themes with a familiar domestic genre and format. Adaptation processes of this kind, however, are inherently uneven and contain moments of selection, interpretation, and intervention. It is precisely the double-translation—between languages and between genres—that, I will show, afforded the Chinese producers of these graphic novels agency,

allowing them to reshape these Soviet imports in decisive and sometimes unpredictable directions. New theorizations of world literature, the paper argues, will have to take into account not only cultural divergences and multiple vectors of textual movement, but also the politics of agency inscribed in genre hierarchies, reading practices, and media uses.

Joseph Brodsky's Borrowed Chinese Voice

Mark Gamsa (Tel Aviv University)

Brodsky's celebrated poem "Letters from the Ming Dynasty" (1977) is a rare instance when China comes to the fore in his work. I will begin by considering this poem against the background of some distant European precedents so as to situate it in the history of world literature. I will then try to explain what "Letters from the Ming Dynasty" does, how it does it and how it connects with the main themes of Brodsky's poetry. To further contextualize "Letters from the Ming Dynasty" in twentieth-century literary history, I will compare it with uses of China by European modernists, to argue that Brodsky's poem may be read as both the culmination of a tradition and a radical departure from it. In conclusion, I will look at some examples of the mirror phenomenon: Chinese writers, who "borrowed the voice" of Westerners. In advance of the workshop, I suggest that you listen to Brodsky introducing and reading the poem in the English translation and in the Russian original. This undated recording is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ4bxvedGPA>

A Poetics of the Writers' Conference

Adhira Mangalagiri (Queen Mary University of London)

This paper discusses the writers' conference as a key site that concretizes intersections among Chinese, Indian, and Soviet literary spheres of the mid twentieth century. In the 1950s-1970s, a flurry of international writers' conferences, hosted across the socialist bloc and emergent Third World, brought together literary figures in the performance of cultural diplomacy. Writers' conferences of this kind are often treated either as fronts for bloc-based politicking conducted in the guise of literary exchange or as romanticized venues of solidarity-building. In contrast to such frames, this paper offers a poetics of the writers' conference in order to grasp the specific form of transnational literary relation this site makes possible. Through a study of the Asian Writers' Conference (New Delhi, 1956) – with a particular focus on the Chinese writers in attendance – I explore the forms of literary exchange that cultural diplomacy enables and question whether such transnational literary activity holds the potential to exceed the aims and limits of diplomacy to forge a specifically *literary* form of relation. In offering a reading of the conference site, this paper engages more broadly with the fate of literary engagement in a world steeped in Cold War-era politics.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz and his Soviet Interlocutors, 1958-1979

Lusia Zaitseva (Harvard University)

After winning the Lenin Peace Prize in 1962, renowned Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) chronicled his extensive contacts with Soviet writers (Chingiz Aitmatov, Rasul Gamzatov, Olzhas Suleimenov, Ilya Ehrenburg, and others) in his Urdu-language prose work *Months and Year of Friendship: Recollections* (Progress Publishing, 1979). This paper seeks to extend our understanding of how non-Western visitors—in Faiz’s case, a Muslim secularist in search of a positive model for unity-in-diversity for his recently independent home country, Pakistan—interacted with a wide range of Soviet writers. A close examination of the style and substance of those interactions reveals much about the tenuous bonds of international socialism and the differing roles played therein by writers from the Soviet center and periphery.

Cassette Tapes and Bell Bottoms: Indians on Screen in Reform Era China

Krista Van Fleet (University of South Carolina)

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the late ‘70s and early ‘80s saw a Chinese obsession with Indian films. Members of the generation that came of age in this time have such fond memories of the foreign and exotic Hindi films that many Indian visitors to China are still serenaded with songs from the handful of films that were screened in that period. Popular Hindi films that were hits in China during this period, parallel cinema of directors such as Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, and finally the cassette culture that enabled the circulation of Hindi film songs are examined primarily for what they meant to Chinese viewers to show how India functioned in a changing Chinese view of global culture. The contemporary rethinking of the 1980s in China serves as the larger framework of the paper, emphasizing how the India craze of the early 1980s challenges the ways in which 21st century scholars see 1985 as marking China’s entry to “world culture.”