

Critique, Debate and Reform in Global Socialism (1950s-1980s)

March 28 Thursday, 10:00 AM – 5:30 PM

Nádor u. 15, Room 103 and online

PROGRAM

10:00 – 10:10 AM Welcome and Opening remarks

Ying Qian (IAS CEU / Columbia University)

Ying Qian is an associate professor in Chinese Cinema and Media at the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University. Her first book, *Revolutionary Becomings: Documentary Media in Twentieth-Century China* (Columbia University Press, 2024) excavates documentary's multi-faceted productivities in China's revolutionary movements. She's now working on a new monograph on media and the ecologies of knowledge in China's reform and opening. Ying Qian's articles have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *New Left Review*, *China Perspectives*, *New Literary History of Modern China*, *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, and other journals and websites. At Columbia, she teaches classes on East Asian cinema, Chinese media cultures, documentary media, media of science and technology, and comparative media theory and history. Drawing from her experiences in filmmaking, she has incorporated creative assignments in her classes, guiding students to try their hands on media production. She is currently a senior core fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at the Central European University.

10:10 – 11:50 AM Panel 1

Chair: **Péter Csunderlik** (IAS CEU / Eötvös Loránd University / Institute of Political History)

Jan Mervart (Czech Academy of Sciences), "Between the local and the global: "Czechoslovak path" to reform socialism"

Abstract: The year 1968 in East Central Europe was primarily marked by the efforts to establish democratic socialism in Czechoslovakia. This process was, among other things, the long-standing result of intellectual debates among Czech and Slovak Marxists about the form of socialism after the end of Stalinism. Introducing the Czechoslovak intellectual environment, this paper focuses primarily on the intrinsic tensions of post-Stalinist thought. On the one hand, thinking about the reform of socialism accepted foreign inspirations (non-Marxist influences, the Yugoslav model), while on the other hand it was strongly oriented towards Czechoslovakia itself, its so-called uniqueness. The paper thus wants to expose the ambivalence of the very concept of Czechoslovak reform socialism, which was both open and closed at the same time.

Jan Mervart (mervart@flu.cas.cz) is a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences, where he focuses on modern Czech and Slovak intellectual and cultural history. He is the author of several books (in Czech), articles and book chapters (in Czech and English), and is a coeditor of *Czechoslovakism* (London: Routledge, 2021) and *Karel Kosík and the Dialectics of the Concrete* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). Together with Jiří Růžička he is the author of "Rehabilitate Marx!" *The*

Czechoslovak Party Intelligentsia and Post-Stalinist Modernity (University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming). Mervart is a member of the editorial collective of the journal *Contradictions*.

Felix Wemheuer (University of Cologne), “Origins of “Market Socialism” in Eastern Europe and China: Cycles of Economic Reforms of the 1960s and 1980s”

Abstract: After the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, Chinese politicians and economists were engaged in debates how to reform the traditional Soviet model of centralized planned economy. Past experiences with decentralisation of planning and rural household responsibility played a role. Furthermore, economic reforms in Eastern Europe, for example in Hungary and Yugoslavia, were important references. The talk will raise the question of how economic policies in the early 1980s were linked to debates during cycles of reforms in the socialist camp after Stalin’s death (1953-1957) and again in the early 1960s. Already at that time, cadres and economists had discussed how to integrate market mechanism and price incentives (“the law of value”) into the system of planned economic. In most of the state socialist countries, these debates came to an end with the Soviet invasion in the CSSR. In China, many leading economists were purged during the Cultural Revolution. However, waves of rehabilitation, politicians and economists could build on knowledge and discourses from the earlier cycles of reform. The talk will analyse this transnational intellectual history based historical documents and academic journals.

Felix Wemheuer is Chair Professor for Modern China Studies at the University of Cologne. His publications include "Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union" (Yale UP 2014) and "A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949-1976" (Cambridge UP 2019). He has the youtube-channel "Studying Maoist China" (<https://www.youtube.com/@felixwemheuerstudyingmaois1051/videos>). In German, he published a reader on “Market Socialism: A Controversial Debate” (Promedia 2021) From 2000 to 2002, Wemheuer studied "History of the CCP" at the People's University in Beijing. Between 2008 and 2010, he was a visiting scholar at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies (Harvard University).

Péter Vámos (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church / HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities), “The Influence of Hungarian Economic Reform Theories and Practices on China’s Market Reforms in the 1980s”

Abstract: In 2019, Hungarian economist János Kornai published an article in the Financial Times entitled “Economists share blame for China’s ‘monstrous’ turn,” arguing that Western intellectuals, including himself, “not only watched China’s transformation with approval but actively contributed to these changes.” Kornai compared himself to “Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the 19th-century tale of an experiment scientist who brought a dead body to life using that era’s technology, the electric shock.” This presentation argues that while foreign economists and intellectuals, including Kornai, did play an important role in shaping the views of Chinese leaders and reform economists about the socialist system, and the problems that China had to face during the reform process, the path that China’s leaders chose significantly differed from the shock therapy and the swift transition from planned economy to market economy that Kornai suggested.

Péter Vámos DSc is a research professor at the Institute of History, HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest, and professor of Chinese history at Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church, Budapest. His research focuses on the modern history and international relations of China, Sino-Soviet relations, and the history of Christianity in China.

Federico Pachetti (Corvinus University / Future Potentials Observatory, MOME), “Spreading Knowledge: American NGOs and Chinese Economic Reforms in the 1980s”

Abstract: This paper explores the assistance that leading American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided to the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) economic reforms during the 1980s. The paper looks at China-focused NGOs, such as the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, as well as at older philanthropic NGOs like the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.

During the 1970s and 1980s, an impressive number of NGOs emerged and quickly came to play an influential role in international politics. Most of them sought to facilitate dialogue between political, economic, and intellectual elites both within the advanced industrial countries and with their counterparts in developing countries in the hopes of bolstering transnational cooperation on common policy dilemmas. Within this context, this paper details American NGOs’ assistance to the PRC through the numerous exchange programs that were created, especially in those fields where Beijing sought foreign support for its modernization programs.

More broadly, the paper asserts, the longer-term significance of the programs was that they enabled Americans and Chinese at all levels—not just the elites—to meet, interact and build personal connections that transcended and enlarged those already created by the American and Chinese governments. Finally, the paper shows that knowledge about China’s economic opening up disseminated by NGOs provided Americans with a better understanding of what lay beyond their national boundaries. Such insights, in turn, allowed the American government and public to also consider the vital role expanding free market and democratic principles played in the maintenance of US global power.

Federico Pachetti is Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department at Corvinus University of Budapest. He is also a research fellow with the Geopolitical Frontiers Research Group, Future Potentials Observatory (FPO), MOME University. Federico received his PhD in Global History from the University of Hong Kong in 2019 and he researches the history of China’s integration into the World Economy during the 1980s.

11:50 AM – 12:10 PM Coffee break

12:10 – 1:25 PM Panel 2

Chair: **Nataliya Zlydneva** (IAS CEU / Russian Academy of Sciences)

Marsha Siefert (CEU), “The White-Haired Girl Comes to Moscow: The 1952 Russian-Language Performance of the Chinese Play as a Dramatization of Global Socialism”

Abstract: Recently I wrote about the Soviet-Chinese co-produced documentary film, *Liberated China*, which premiered on 1 October 1950, the first anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. While watching the film, directed by Sergei A. Gerasimov, I was struck by the length of time he devoted to a performance of the popular Chinese play, *The White-Haired Girl*. But during his negotiation on four versions with the Central Documentary Studio, they were pressuring him to minimize that scene and he was resisting. Why? And why did it matter?

Come to find out that in 1952 the play, by He Jingzhi and Ding Ni, was awarded a Stalin prize and Gerasimov produced the play – live in Moscow – at the prestigious Vakhtangov Theater, in Russian translation with Russian actors in Chinese costume. In my presentation I will talk about this hitherto unexplored experiment in global socialism during the honeymoon of the Sino-Soviet alliance. With reference to the workshop, I see this theatrical performance, which toured also in Ukraine and Central

Asia, as a subtle contribution to dramatizing “how to organize political, economic and cultural lives according to socialist principles.”

Marsha Siefert is an Associate Professor of History at Central European University. She specializes in cultural and communications history, particularly media industries and public diplomacy, from the nineteenth-century to the present. The most recent of her six edited books is *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945-1989: Contributions to a History of Work*, which appeared with CEU Press in 2020. This talk represents a new study deriving from her research on postwar Soviet co-produced films and cultural diplomacy. Previous articles appear in a special issue of *Cinema and Story* on “Rethinking the Cinematic Cold War” and in the forthcoming book, *Frames of Reconstruction: Non-fiction Cinema, Transnational Visual Culture and Public Space in Postwar Europe*.

Mariia Guleva (Charles University), “Let us learn from these works: encounters and discussions among cartoonists from China, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union in the 1950s” (online)

Abstract: The first decade of communist rule in China and Czechoslovakia was the period of active cooperation between them and the Soviet Union in various spheres. Cartoons, an acknowledged visual tool of propaganda and mass mobilisation, were vigorously employed in all three states, and the presence of specialised satire magazines there and in the other socialist camp countries allowed for the unfolding of a broad network of cartoonists across the camp. Such artists as Boris Efimov, Hua Junwu 华君武, Adolf Hoffmeister, and numerous others travelled across borders to accompany cartoon or more general art exhibitions, meet fellow cartoonists, teach and learn from each other. Public and internal reports following such visits regularly mentioned “learning” from foreign experiences as a significant outcome of those state-supported trips. Indeed, if one looks at the satire magazines published in the socialist camp countries—e.g. Krokodil in the USSR, Manhua 漫画 in the PRC, and Dikobraz or Roháč in Czechoslovakia—the illusion of cartoons’ socialist unanimity and homogeneity is strongly present, both in the ideologically-determined themes and visual vocabularies. Did the 1950s bring about a “socialist cartoon” shared across the socialist camp, then? By scrutinising the magazines’ contents, published reports of visits, and archival materials related to them, I show that “learning” from each other remained limited and superficial; although cartoonists’ encounters (sometimes direct and at other times mediated through embassies or cultural institutions) did on occasion bring some criticism regarding cartoons’ form and contents, the ways cartooning evolved in each of the countries was defined primarily by respective domestic policies, so that “socialist cartoon” did not emerge as a homogeneous propaganda form.

Mariia Guleva graduated from St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University, majoring in Chinese Studies, in 2010. She obtained a Candidate of Science (History) degree from Kazan Federal University in 2016. She taught at St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University, St. Petersburg State University, and St. Petersburg branch of Higher School of Economics between 2010 and 2019, after which she enrolled in a Ph.D. programme at Charles University in Prague. Since 2019 she has been a Ph.D. student at the Department of Sinology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, also teaching English-language courses for Erasmus students there (“Cartooning, animation, and comics art in China” and “Ten images of twentieth-century China”). Mariia is currently in the final year of her Ph.D. programme, for which she has obtained generous financial support from the European branch of Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (doctoral fellowship, European region).

Chris Berry (King's College London), "Beyond the Sino-Soviet Split: Year of the Dragon (1981) as an Anti-Eastern Film"

Abstract: This paper peels back layers of unstable allegorical meaning in the Soviet 1981 film *Year of the Dragon* (Год Дракона, 1981) to reveal tensions around nation self-determination and imperial legacies in the supposedly anti-imperialist socialist countries. On the surface, the film is a historical action epic that tells the story of the Qing Dynasty conquest of what we know today as Xinjiang. Made at a time when Soviet-Chinese relations were very poor, it is also an allegorical critique of the contemporary People's Republic of China as an imperial state that conquers and assimilates minorities. This is in implicit contrast to the USSR's policy of setting up each nation as a republic. Despite winning awards and being an entertaining film, it was given very little distribution. Is this because, as some have suggested, as a film made in Kazakhstan, the inherently unstable meaning of allegory might lay it open to being misunderstood as a critique of the Soviet Union as a new Russian Empire? In this light, I propose a genre-based analysis of *Year of the Dragon* in relation to the *Isterny* (Eastern) films that borrowed the motifs of the Hollywood Western – and the spaghetti western – to tell the tale of Soviet pioneers in Central Asia. Furthermore, the film had a co-director of Korean background. Given that Koreans were an ethnicity that did not have a republic inside the USSR, I ask if the allegory allowed for even more indirect expression of anti-imperialist critique by him.

Chris Berry is Professor in the Film Studies Department at King's College London. His research focuses on cinemas of the Sinosphere. He is the co-author of *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* and has a particular interest in Sino-Korean screen relations.

1:25 – 2:30 PM Lunch break

2:30 – 3:45 PM Panel 3

Chair: **Nikolai Vukov** (IAS CEU / Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Letian Lei (CEU), "Marxist humanism in the 'Soviet-type' contexts"

Abstract: Marxist humanism is a transnational intellectual phenomenon. However, the existing research literature on it is limited to certain regions, especially Central Europe (Budapest school, Praxis school, etc.). In my presentation, I will outline the missing variants of Marxist humanism in China (Wang Ruoshui et al.) and the Soviet Union (Evald Ilyenkov et al.). Then, I will argue why these variants could and should be put into a category of "Marxist humanism in the 'Soviet-type' contexts" and explain what I mean by "Soviet-type contexts". Last but not least, I will distinguish between the Marxist humanist traditions that evolved in the "Soviet-type contexts" and those that evolved in other contexts.

Letian Lei is a graduate student from the history department of the Central European University. He researches intellectual history and political theory in East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe.

Andrea Virginás (IAS CEU / Babes-Bolyai University), "Lightweight Equipment in Post-Stalinist Romania: Filmmakers' Views, and Meta-Representations" (online)

Abstract: In line with the governing idea inspired by Octavio Getino, Fernando Solanas and Laura Mulvey – that the media technologies available for production are capable of inducing social change and artistic creativity alike – this paper focuses on the conceptualization and representation of lightweight camera technology in a communist-era Romanian context (and a somewhat diasporically

interrelated Hungarian one). According to the main argument advanced, this technological and cultural phenomenon allowed for the emergence of such ideas and mentalities and, ultimately, works of art and authorial profiles that may adequately be categorized within the thematic issue's concept of 'cultures of dissent'. In developing the argumentation three different sets of data were analyzed: oral historical sources (including original ones), archival printed material and fiction films from the examined period. Thus memoirs of and/or structured life-path interviews with film director Lucian Pintilie as well as cinematographer-directors István Fischer and Iosif Demian – the latter with lesser known, but in many respects similar experiences of dissidence – are cross-examined with the artistic meta-representation of lightweight film and television technologies in 'dissident' fiction films: Lucian Pintilie's 1968 *Reconstituirea / Reconstruction*, István Fischer's 1971 *Legalább Európát! / Europe at Least!*, and Iosif Demian's 1980 *O lacrimă de fată / A Maiden's Tear*.

Dr. Hab. Andrea Virginás is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeş- Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Bolyai János Research Fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (2021-2024), Affiliated Research Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies, Central European University (2023-2024), project leader of Cultural Traumas in Contemporary European Small National Cinemas (Romania, 2022-2024), and Romanian unit responsible in AGE-C: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema (2023-2027). Research interests: film genres, cultural and gendered stereotypes, narrative, medial and memory structures – specifically the audiovisually mediatized processing of collective traumas, including environmental trauma. Latest volume: *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory, Reception* (Lexington Books, 2021).

Sabrina Qiong Yu (Newcastle University), "Chinese Independent Film Archive: Preserving Memories of Socialist China and Beyond"

Abstract: Chinese Independent Film Archive (CIFA) is dedicated to the preservation of and access to Chinese independent film culture, a culture that has been systematically marginalised, increasingly inaccessible and slowly disappearing within China, mainly due to state censorship. As the key outcome of a UK research council-funded project, CIFA aims not only to safeguard this film culture for future generations, but also act as an alternative record of social changes, historical traumas, and the lives of ordinary people in contemporary China. This talk will focus on the work around building the CIFA in the past five years and the archive's significance in preserving memories of Socialist and Post-Socialist China.

Sabrina Qiong Yu is Professor of Film and Chinese Studies at Newcastle University, UK. Her research and publications focus on Chinese independent cinema, stardom and performance, gender and sexuality, and memory. She is the author of *Jet Li: Chinese Masculinity and Transnational Film Stardom* (2012, 2015), the co-editor, with Guy Austin, of *Revisiting Star Studies: Cultures, Themes and Methods* (2017, 2018). She is the Principal Investigator of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project (2019-2024) on Chinese independent cinema, the founder of Chinese Independent Film Archive (CIFA) and the bi-lingual journal *Chinese Independent Cinema Observer*. Since 2012, she has been regularly curating events/festivals/exhibitions related to Chinese indie cinema and is committed to promoting the research and the international circulation of Chinese independent cinema.

3:45 – 4:00 PM Coffee break

4:00 – 5:30 PM Roundtable Discussion “Thinking about Global Socialisms Today”

Chair: **Ying Qian** (IAS CEU / Columbia University)

Speakers:

Jessie Labov (Corvinus University)

Oksana Sarkisova (CEU / OSA Archivum)

Felix Wemheuer (University of Cologne)

Jan Mervart (Czech Academy of Sciences)

Chris Berry (King’s College London)

Jessie Labov is Associate Professor of Communication and Media Sciences and Senior Research Fellow at the Corvinus Institute for Advanced Studies at Corvinus University. She is also a researcher in the Department of Literary Theory at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Research Network. She has held positions at McDaniel College Budapest, Central European University and the Ohio State University. Jessie’s scholarship has always focused on Central and Southeastern Europe, and her book *Transatlantic Central Europe: Contesting Geography and Creating Culture Beyond the Nation* was published by CEU Press in 2019.

Oksana Sarkisova is Research Fellow at Blinken OSA Archivum at Central European University, Director of Verzio International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, Budapest, and co-founder of Visual Studies Platform at CEU. Her fields of research are cultural history, memory and representation, film history, amateur photography, and visual studies. She authored *In Visible Presence: Soviet Afterlives in Family Photos* (with Olga Shevchenko, 2023), *Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia* (2017), co-edited *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (2008), and has published in peer-reviewed journals and collective volumes on film history, nationality politics, contemporary Russian and Eastern European cinema, and amateur photography. She teaches courses on documentary cinema, film history, visual studies, and memory politics. She directed CEU Summer University Programs *Documentary Cinema in the Digital Century* (2013), *Screened Memories: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Visual Culture* (2016), and *Fields of Vision: Memory, Identity, and Images of the Past* (2019), participated as tutor and invited faculty in the workshop series *Cinema Without Borders* (by *Movies that Matter* HRIF), *Summer School on Cinema and Human Rights* (Galway), *This is Film! 2023*. *Film Heritage in Practice* public lecture series (by Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam), among others. She served as Jury member at several International Film Festivals, including those in Nuremberg, Kyiv, Zagreb, Warsaw, Tbilisi, Linz, the Hague, Ljubljana, Graz, and Vienna.

Zoom meeting link:

<https://ceu-edu.zoom.us/j/95503846435?pwd=RXItVS9XMlltajdTUG4yZnM0d0hRUT09>