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Sovetskaia kul'turnaia diplomatiia v usloviiakh Kholodnoi voiny, by O. S. Nagornaia, O. Iu. Nikonova, A. D. Popov, T. V. Raeva and N. A. Tregubov, Moscow, Rosspen, 2018, 446 pp., 350 roubles (hardback), ISBN 978-5-8243-2282-8 (hardback)

During the past fifteen years, there has been growing interest in Soviet cultural diplomacy with a number of studies focusing on cultural exchange, exhibitions, foreign tourism, artistic tours, international events and propaganda. To date, the majority of these works have focused on specific cases and on certain sectors while the broad picture of how the Soviet Union sought to influence others has remained unwritten. Therefore, this volume on Soviet cultural diplomacy during the Cold War years is a very welcome addition to the historiography.

The work is based on a research project lead by Professor Oksana Nagornaya at the South Ural State University in Cheliabinsk. All the contributors, Olga Nikonova, Tatiana Raeva, Nikolai Trebukov and Aleksei Popov, are established scholars of the culturally oriented political history of the Soviet Union, each focusing on specific areas. Despite the number of authors, this work is not a traditional edited volume but a collective monograph, which beautifully brings together the expertise of the research group.

Theoretically, the work draws on recent scholarship on cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power but also reaches beyond the nation state framework with concepts like cultural internationalism and transnationalism. The authors define cultural diplomacy broadly as a special political communication, which targets foreign and domestic audiences with the aim of forming a positive image of the country and which is channelled through a variety of actors, state bodies and non-governmental organisations as well as individuals. The book brings together a diverse selection of topics, ranging from more traditional fields such as tourism, international events and academic exchanges to lesser-studied areas of cultural diplomacy: memory politics, peace movements, Stalin/Lenin prizes and individual cultural mediators.

The strength of the book is its ability to successfully combine the analysis of institutional structures and agency, resulting in a multi-layered and rich discussion that provides the reader with a complete understanding of what Soviet cultural diplomacy was made of. Especially useful for understanding the institutional mechanisms and functioning of the system is a detailed discussion of the structural environment and the institutional agents who managed the field of cultural diplomacy within the party-state apparatus. Besides the obvious ones, the ministry of foreign affairs, the KGB and special bodies addressing foreign cultural relations (VOKS, SSOD, GKKS), numerous societal organisations, such as friendship societies, were involved in the task of conveying a positive image of the Soviet Union.

Also important were the transnational structures that aimed to promote the Soviet Union as a moral authority and guarantor of world peace. These included the set of organisations connected with the agenda of supporting world peace, such as the World Peace Council, which serves as a great example of an international institution that simultaneously attempted to distance itself from the

Soviet political leadership and act in a way that supported their foreign policy aims. Another significant international form of cultural diplomacy was the World Festivals of Youth and Students, which provided spaces for cross-cultural encounters, exchange and display of national achievements, just like the more famous Western mega-events, the World Expos and the Olympic Games. The fact that even activities for children, like the international children's camp, Artek, can be viewed as part of the network of "cultural ambassadors" demonstrates how widespread and all-encompassing was the effort to have a political impact on others in Soviet society.

The periodisation and the development of cultural diplomatic practices follow the traditional lines of Soviet political history. It is no surprise that the most radical change took place after the death of Stalin in the mid-1950s as Nikita Khrushchev took a new course with the country's foreign policy. Culture as a foreign policy tool and communication with foreign publics became globally more popular in the late 1950s. For the Soviet Union, there was also an urgent need to invest in image improvement: Hungary 1956. The brutal repression of the uprising in Hungary meant a huge failure in terms of image management and forced the political leadership to re-think and re-organise the structures of cultural diplomacy. The late 1950s and the early 1960s, saw a great boost in the field: the establishment of numerous target-oriented associations, tourist agencies, scientific and cultural institutes, as well as the signing of bilateral cultural agreements with a number of Western and Global South countries.

Many things changed after the death of Stalin. However, as the authors argue, two features already prevailing in Stalin's time continued to characterise Soviet cultural diplomacy throughout the Cold War period. First, the vast contradiction between the promotion of the Soviet Union as guardian and fighter for world peace and the reality of Soviet foreign policy with its military confrontations (especially 1956, 1968, 1979) made it difficult to convince people about the peaceful nature of the country. Second, the history politics, the victory over Fascism in WWII in particular, as well as the use of international events (esp. the World Festivals of Youth and Students) remained effective and successful forms for shaping the image and the self-identity of the Soviet Union throughout the postwar period.

Another significant change in the Khrushchev era was the focus on face-to-face diplomacy and cross-cultural encounters. These were facilitated by opening the Soviet Union to foreign tourists and sending more Soviet cultural representatives abroad. While in the Stalin years mainly writers, the likes of Ilia Ehrenburg, Aleksandr Fadeev and Konstantin Fedin, had served as the mediators and missionaries of the first socialist state, from the 1960s onwards that place was reserved for scientists, artists, athletes and cosmonauts. Moreover, foreign tourists, as well as students in Soviet higher education institutes coming from the then called Third World countries, formed a vast and important group of people with first-hand experience of the Soviet way of life. An interesting group of actors were the foreign Stalin and Lenin prize winners, who were expected to show loyalty towards the socialist system and support Soviet interests in their home countries. Most of the prizes were awarded to West European cultural and political figures, but this global network of friends of the Soviet Union reached out also to Latin America and Africa.

The authors describe Brezhnev era cultural diplomacy as an activity that routinely continued along the traditional lines, with no significant changes. Although the huge gap between the bombastic global ideals and the narrowing material and technical resources started to reveal the wide systemic

defects, the Soviet Union still managed to represent itself as a flourishing superpower and the leader of the socialist bloc at the World Expo in Osaka in 1970 and at its own grandiose sporting spectacle, the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980. Towards the end of the 1980s, many of the forms of cultural diplomacy either decreased or commercialised, which increased the gap between the narrative of the great socialist state securing peace and well-being for the world and the existing reality in the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev, whose new thinking was very positively received abroad, paradoxically only speeded up the collapse of the system by allowing open discussion. Finally, Soviet people simply ceased to believe that the Soviet Union was able to compete with the West, not only in terms of military-strategic confrontation, but also at the cultural and symbolic levels. It is hard to make others believe in something that you do not believe in yourself.

This monograph provides multiple well written and carefully examined studies on specific issues, which offer us new insights into the agents and structures of the state-party apparatus that were harnessed to construct a positive image of the Soviet Union outside of its borders. While they work nicely together, the grand story still remains incomplete. As the authors point out, the topic is so huge that some themes and dimensions are inevitably missing and need more examination. One of the missing elements is the notoriously difficult subject of reception. The analysis would have benefitted from considering what the outcomes of all these activities were among different target audiences and in different parts of the world, given that the system used vast amounts of material and human resources. Perhaps the exploration into world of reception and experiences of Soviet cultural endeavours will be the plot of the next publication from this scholarly community.

Furthermore, what I expected to see more, were the classic and folk arts, the distribution of Soviet films abroad and the ubiquitous print propaganda. It is true that there are already works covering these topics, however, it would have been interesting to see how these fields, that were so visible and important for Soviet cultural life, fitted their analysis of Soviet cultural diplomacy strategies and how important these fields were for the political establishment. All in all, while this book is by no means the last word on the topic, it is, without a doubt, highly recommended reading for all interested in how and with what kind of arsenal the Soviet Union navigated the arenas of the cultural Cold War.