

The Foreign-Policy Aspect of Mei Lanfang's Soviet Tour in 1935

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ABSTRACT

The Soviet tour in 1935 of the eminent Chinese male interpreter of female roles, Mei Lanfang, attracted justified international attention as a pioneering instance of cultural and aesthetic exchange. This is not least due to the fact that it was the first time a traditional Chinese theatre troupe made a guest appearance in Europe and that so many prominent Russian and other European theatre innovators consequently eagerly followed the event and reacted to the traditional Chinese stage conventions according to their very different aesthetic points of view. Complementing my published research over the years into the details of this major intercultural stage event, in this article I reverse my perspective and almost exclusively focus on its foreign-policy context. I demonstrate that from the more pragmatic point of view of international politics at the time, another aspect of Mei's tour was much more important: It was an act of cultural diplomacy which helped break a deadlock in foreign relations between the Soviet Union and the Republic of China, and in so doing helped facilitate their formation of a defensive military alliance in response to the rapidly increasing Japanese aggression against them both. War memories, as well as memory wars, formed part of this foreign-policy staging of Mei Lanfang's Soviet guest appearance and its subsequent documentation.

KEYWORDS

Beijing Opera, Chinese communist party, cultural diplomacy, Guomindang, Lu Xun, Mei Lanfang's Soviet tour 1935, Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations, Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact, socialist realism, theatre historiography, Yan Huiqing.

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The well-known dictum of Karl von Clausewitz: 'War is the continuation of politics by other means', has at least one less belligerent logistic complement: cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy as such at all times has an agenda determined by foreign politics and sometimes by war strategy.

Depending on context and situation, connected war memories, in fact any cultural memories, may become the issues of contemporary or subsequent memory wars due to oppression, distortion or misrepresentation, or on the contrary, due to the insistence that they are unrefutable memories and the assertion that there are lessons to be learned from them. Not least, international Sovietology is indeed more than familiar with the Orwellian proportions of sorting out such distortions – as the fairly recent in-depth studies by such heavyweights in this field as the Russian Oleg Khlevniuk, the German Karl Schlögel, or the American Katerina Clark still amply demonstrate¹. This article is also such an in-depth study, however within the humbler scope of merely highlighting a minor incident: the Soviet tour of a Chinese theatre troupe and the rapidly changing field of its immediate and subsequent historiographical contexts.

It stands to reason that Soviet cultural diplomacy always had a corresponding overall agenda which however varied according to shifts in domestic and foreign policy. In terms of practical logistics, its central executing organ was the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS: Всесоюзное общество культурной связи с заграницей), which operated from 1925 to 1957 and was divided into sections according to geography (such as the East Section (Восточный отдел) covering Asia); but in 1957 this was replaced by Friendship Societies between the Soviet Union and each separate country.

The Soviet tour in 1935 of the eminent Chinese male interpreter of female roles, Mei Lanfang, was organized by VOKS. The tour attracted justified international attention as a pioneering instance of cultural and aesthetic exchange. This is not least due to the fact that it was the first time a traditional Chinese theatre troupe made a guest appearance in Europe and that so many prominent Russian and other European theatre innovators consequently eagerly followed the event

1 Khlevniuk (2015). Schlögel (2008). Clark (2011).

and reacted to the traditional Chinese stage conventions according to their very different aesthetic points of view. Over the years I have published my research into the details of this major intercultural stage event on several occasions.² In this article, however, I shall reverse my perspective and almost exclusively focus on its foreign-policy context. I shall demonstrate, that from the more pragmatic point of view of international politics at the time, another aspect of Mei's tour was much more important: It had been staged by the host, the Soviet Union, as a pragmatic diplomatic gesture to the Republic of China to help break a deadlock in foreign relations between the two young states, and in so doing help facilitate their formation of a defensive military alliance in response to the rapidly increasing Japanese aggression against them both. War memories, as well as memory wars, formed part of this foreign-policy staging of Mei Lanfang's Soviet guest appearance and its subsequent documentation.

CROSS-DRESSING AND REALPOLITIK

In 1934 Stalin decreed socialist realism to be the new aesthetic doctrine for Soviet artists to follow. This did not prevent him from simultaneously inviting the most famous male interpreter of female roles in traditional Chinese theatre, Mei Lanfang, to make a guest appearance in the Soviet Union the following spring. From the point of view of Soviet domestic policy, this invitation could hardly be more paradoxical: The Kremlin officially inviting and indeed welcoming, a cultural and artistic exchange with the most seductive representative of a manifestly theatrical and feudal stage tradition with men practising cross-dressing in all female parts!

In Soviet everyday life in 1935, such a guest appearance would seem puzzlingly politically incorrect: Stalin defying his own new state art doctrine of socialist realism? Rather than as a godsend against all odds, to most Russian theatre and film artists it would more realistically have appeared as an equivocal import of forbidden fruit by an unpredictable Kremlin, and even possibly a trap, should they venture to use the occasion to put forward dissenting views.

However, if you consider the invitation from the point of view of Sino-Soviet foreign politics, inviting Mei was a piece of realpolitik, which had less to do with Mei than is often thought.

CHINA, RUSSIA AND MILITARISTIC JAPAN

In China a revolution in 1911 had overthrown the Manchu dynasty. The republican party Guomindang (GMD: The National Party) founded the Republic of China, but the vast country soon disintegrated into warring zones and remained a fragmented semi-feudal, semi-colony until the communist takeover in 1949.

Bordering on China as well as Japan, Russia's relations with both countries had a long history. Besides, China's vast territory was the geographical buffer between Russia and the continually arming militaristic Japan. After World War I the new Soviet Union was the only country to revoke all its former unequal treaties with China. In 1921 the Chinese communist party (CCP) was founded. The Soviet Union established a pragmatic alliance with the GMD government, and the CCP

2 Risum 2001a. Risum 2001b. Risum 2008. Risum 2016. Risum 2018.

became a section of the GMD (through individual double memberships).³ In 1924 a Soviet-Chinese pact and diplomatic relations were established.⁴ Soviet advisors were sent to China. In an effort to unite China with Soviet military support, the GMD army and its Soviet auxiliaries advanced from the south and captured a large part of China (the so-called Northern expedition). But in 1927 the strong man of the right wing of the GMD, Chiang Kai-Shek, massacred the communists in Shanghai and established a right-wing government in Nanjing, which broke completely with the CCP.

The Soviet leadership was left with no option but to face the total defeat of its policy in China, and the concomitant cost in human lives. In Moscow Trotsky and his supporters in vain criticised Stalin for having instructed the CCP to trust the GMD at all and to continue doing so against all odds; but on the other hand the Trotskyites just as unrealistically argued that a revolutionary situation had come into being.

In 1929 China's GMD government severed its diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.⁵ All the same, China was the only country besides Russia where a revolution was still in progress. In 1931 the CCP was strong enough to proclaim an All-Chinese Soviet Republic in their rural base area in the province of Jiangxi with Mao Zedong as president.

However, the chaotic facts of Chinese domestic and foreign politics soon took a new turn for the worse. In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria – thus posing a threat to China and Russia alike. Immediately the Soviet Union suggested the GMD government resume diplomatic relations, but the GMD expected assistance from the capitalist countries and was not interested.⁶

With regards to the Manchurian question, the League of Nations backed the Republic of China, but on the other hand it also acknowledged that Japan had special historical interests in the region. Not until it was disillusioned by the League of Nation's compliance with Japan, did the GMD decide to resume diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The GMD desired a non-aggression pact thrown into the bargain, but the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, flatly refused anything but an unconditional resumption of relations.⁷

The appointed Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Yan Huiqing, presented his credentials in Moscow in March 1933.⁸ However, the rapprochement

3 A GMD congress in January 1924 elects a permanent Central Executive Committee with 24 full members (of whom 3 are communists) and 17 candidate members (of whom 6 are communists). Thus between 20 and 25 percent of the top GMD officials are CCP members, despite the fact that the CCP is a very small party (Jacobs 1981, 134). A GMD congress in January 1926 elects a Central Executive Committee with 36 members (of whom 7 are communists and 14 belong to the GMD left). (Jacobs 1981, 190).

4 "Sino-Soviet Agreements, May 31, 1924" (the documents). (Aitchen K. Wu 1950, 347-359).

5 Yen 1940, 339. Crowley (ed.) 1970, 182.

6 Aitchen K. Wu 1950, 214.

7 Aitchen K. Wu 1950, 221. "The proposal from Nanking about a nonaggression pact is utter chicanery. Really, the Nanking government consists entirely of petty crooks. This does not mean, of course, that we should not deal with these crooks or with their proposal for a nonaggression pact, but it certainly pays to keep in mind that they are petty crooks," admonishes Stalin in a letter on 19 June 1932 to Molotov. (Lih, Naumov & Klevniuk eds. 1995, 229).

8 Aitchen K. Wu 1950, 219.

was reciprocally lukewarm. In 1933 Yan and Litvinov drafted a Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact, but once again the GMD did not swallow the bait.⁹ Meanwhile, the League of Nations finally reproached Japan for having invaded Manchuria, and Japan left the League in protest.

The Japanese army was occupying a steadily increasing area of China, and simultaneously a civil war was being fought. Determined to destroy the CCP before facing the Japanese invaders, Chiang Kai-shek had succeeded in isolating and threatening the rural base areas of the CCP, and within these areas the CCP central committee was pursuing a policy of isolationism. Jiang immediately launched a general attack on the CCP base areas. Moreover, due to Soviet military intervention in January 1934 in the Chinese province of Xinjiang, in February 1934 Yan Huiqing was recalled from his ambassadorship in Moscow for an indefinite period.

THE REALPOLITIK OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE RIGHT OFFER AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

At this zero point the Kremlin flattered Chiang Kai-shek by inviting the most illustrious national icon of the Republic of China, Mei Lanfang, to make a guest appearance in the Soviet Union. In the light of the preceding events, I suggest that the intention of the foreign-policy would be to kill two birds with one stone. The Soviet Union needed a strengthened China as a buffer against Japan. It needed a bilateral pact with China, as well as to somehow restore in China itself the past alliance between the GMD and the CCP in order to hold Japan off. In short, the Kremlin very much needed Yan Huiqing to return to Moscow to resume negotiations and used the invitation to Mei Lanfang as an appropriate bait or, if you will, a piece of window dressing. From beginning to end then, the key figure of the event was the GMD ambassador Yan Huiqing, and not the world-famous actor Mei Lanfang (a fact which Mei was to leave understandably out of the account when he published his reminiscences of his Soviet tour in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s). Inviting Mei was a piece of theatre internationally as well: Mei's American tour in 1930 had been a huge commercial success and he had been presented as his country's semi-official cultural ambassador. Now the Soviet Union outdid the USA by inviting Mei at a state level, and to the new Socialist Mecca of theatre art, Moscow, for all the world to see.

Guomindang's motives for making Yan Huiqing return to his post in Moscow were equally ambiguous: "It was obvious after several conferences with the high officials at Nanking [the capital of the Republic of China, JR] that there was no definite policy in foreign affairs, the tendency being to let things drift until some vague propitious turn in the international situation made its appearance somehow

9 "The relations between China and the Soviet Union before the outbreak of the present hostilities with Japan might and could have been strengthened. There has been a certain amount of misunderstanding, suspicions and misgiving on the part of one toward the other." (Yen 1940, 341). "As early as 1933, Dr. W. W. Yen, Chinese ambassador to Moscow, had started negotiations with Litvinov, the Soviet People's Foreign Commissar, for the conclusion of a Non-Aggression Pact. Had the Chinese authorities been more far-sighted, they would have immediately approved the pact." (Aitchen K. Wu 1950, 265).

or other,” and consequently the more unassuming official object of Mei’s guest appearance “was to promote cultural relations between the two peoples,” Yan later explains to us.¹⁰ On the same note, before he left for his Soviet tour, Mei Lanfang told the Soviet chargé d’affaires in Shanghai, that when the idea was first aired in February 1934, Yan Huiqing had backed it at once as an opportunity to demonstrate the good diplomatic relations between their two countries; and Mei also intimated that he was himself fully “aware of the political importance of his tour.”¹¹

Considerably less impressed, the Chinese writer Lu Xun in Shanghai sarcastically wrote in June 1934:

China always followed a closed-door policy: she would not leave home herself nor let others in. Since having her front gate breached by cannon and knocking her head several times against a brick wall, she has now adopted a give-away policy in everything. [...] I hear that before long we shall be sending Dr. Mei Lan-fang to the Soviet Union to promote ‘symbolism’, after which he will go to Europe to lecture. It is not my intention here to discuss the relationship between Dr. Mei’s art and symbolism. I merely want to point out that this is a manifest improvement, substituting live men for antiques. [...] I am just urging that we should be a little more parsimonious and take things over as well as giving them away.¹²

Indeed, substituting live men for antiques had been one aspect of the enthusiastic American reception of the art of Mei Lanfang. So had the paradox of the American cultural elite opening up to a foreign theatre tradition in the shape of a troupe arriving from its distant homeland, rather than watching its own Chinese-American performers do the same a few blocks away as part of the American multicultural environment. The challenge to nearly all Russian spectators was to be another and even greater one: for the first time ever to be able to see Jingju and to compare it to their own notions and discussions of theatre and its social function.

THE PROGRAMME SELECTED FOR THE SOVIET TOUR

Mei Lanfang’s tours abroad - to Japan in 1919 and 1924, to the USA in 1930, and to the Soviet Union in 1935 – travelled to very different cultures and correspondingly differed as intercultural artistic initiatives. On the one hand, such artistic exchanges were at odds with the rapidly escalating political wall-buildings of the early twentieth century, but on the other hand they were conditioned and controlled by the more hardcore realpolitik of the respective foreign-policies at work

10 Yen 1974, 219.

11 «Д-р Мей понимает политическое значение своей поездки: еще в феврале прошл. года, когда впервые был поставлен вопрос о поездке д-ра Мей в СССР, одним из инициаторов этого вопроса явился посол Китая в СССР д-р Янь Хуй-цын. В своей беседе с д-ром Мей он сообщил ему следующее: “Между народами Китая и СССР нет никакие противоречий, существует тесная дружба, которую оба народа стремятся оформить.”», typewritten confidential summary of conversation between the Soviet chargé d’affaires Spilvanek and Mei Lanfang on 18 January 1935 in Shanghai, ГАРФ 5283-8-267-115.

12 ‘The Take-Over Policy’ (7 June 1934). (Lu Hsun [Lu Xun] 1956-1960 vol. 4, 49-50).

behind them. Thus, the incompatibility of the US and the Soviet Union as social systems and cultural contexts was taken very much into account in the manner in which the Mei troupe planned its American and Soviet tours, resulting in them becoming almost antithetical events. The artistic programmes to be presented differed correspondingly. Only some of their items were the same.

From his comprehensive active repertoire for his American tour, Mei Lanfang and his assistants composed a programme of plays and dances, which together demonstrated the excellence and wide scope of his centuries old theatre tradition and of his personal artistic skills, ranging from tender civilian love scenes to fierce stage combat.

However for his Soviet tour five years later, they composed a programme of plays and dances which primarily catered to Soviet taste by contrasting portrayals of cowed women with portrayals of female civilians revolting against oppressors or of female warriors engaged in battle and showing various types of combat scenes such as sword dances. Mei also performed the climax of his quite recent patriotic play, *Fighting Against the Jin*, which is set in a historical precedent to the ongoing Japanese invasion of China and whose protagonist, a female general, battles against the invaders and performs a sword dance in full armour. The most popular plays during the tour would turn out to be *The Fisherman's Revenge*, which was interpreted from a Soviet perspective as the victory of the proletariat over the feudal lords, the military play *Rainbow Pass* which has a female warrior in the lead, and *The Drunken Beauty* in which a neglected imperial concubine is so frustrated that she gets drunk.



FIGURE 1. Mei Lanfang as the female warrior *Dongfangshi* in the military play *Rainbow Pass* (*Hongni guan*). Woodcut by G. A. Yecheistov. Moscow 1935. Frontispiece of *Mei Lanfang i kitajskij teatr* (Mei Lanfang and the Chinese theatre), Moskva-Leningrad: Izdanie Vsesojuznogo obščestva kul’turnoj svjazi s zagranitsej, 1935.

'I FEEL AS IF I AM A SUPPORTING ACTOR'

The Chinese ambassador Yan Huiqing returned to Moscow escorted by a large delegation consisting of his embassy staff, the Mei troupe, and three representatives of Chinese film (the Chinese film actress Hu Die (aka Miss Butterfly), and the Chinese film director Zhou Ke and his wife). However, on their arrival in the Russian sea port of Vladivostok, Yan and his staff parted with the artists so as to arrive in Moscow one day later than Mei (on 13 March),¹³ and so Mei was cheered as the main star of the event by the Soviet press from the moment he was filmed arriving in Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway and stepping out on the platform, to the moment he left.

The All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) gave a lunch to welcome Mei Lanfang. The common theme of the speeches was cultural exchange and mutual respect as a prerequisite for friendship and economic and political cooperation between two countries. On a more idealistic note, Mei Lanfang stated his conviction that: "The most precious thing about art lies in the truth that 'art does not share any boundaries.'" As the returning Chinese ambassador, Yan Huiqing delivered the required diplomatic speech: "However, in such a sumptuous banquet as this, I feel as if I am a supporting actor," he most aptly put it.¹⁴

The Soviet commissar of foreign affairs, Litvinov, personally gave Mei's guest appearance the official seal of approval by either participating in the event himself or sending his subordinates. Litvinov also approved in advance the official speech of welcome addressed to Mei Lanfang before the curtain on the first night of his guest appearance.¹⁵ And when Yan Huiqing also appeared on the stage, he was met with a burst of applause, which was duly reported in a Shanghai newspaper.¹⁶

Mei Lanfang was the most illustrious cultural state icon of the Republic of China, and therefore its unofficial cultural ambassador. The Moscow correspondent to the *New York Herald Tribune*, Ralph W. Barnes, would even have it that "Moscow, which is one of the most theater-conscious cities in the world, is paying more attention to this theatrical ambassador from the Far East than it would to a visiting Foreign Minister."¹⁷ And the Chinese journalist, I quoted above, put it to his Shanghai readers in this way:

*International observers in Moscow remarked the obvious fact that the welcome and the reception given to Mei Lan-fang far exceeded the limits of that accorded to artists. It bore the stamp of governmental approval quite apart from the spontaneous popular welcome handed out to Mei Lan-fang by the Soviet public.*¹⁸

13 AA, «Приезд посла китайской республики», *Правда* 1 March 1935.

14 Ge 1935, 5-6.

15 Arosev's handwritten speech of welcome on the stage 23 March 1935, typed copies of it, and copy of accompanying letter by N. Kulyabko (Н. Кулябко) in VOKS 23 March 1935 to the secretariat of Litvinov in NKID (НКВД, секретариат тов. Литвинова, М. М.): «Текст речи, которая будет произнесена тов. Аросевым сегодня при открытии спектаклей театра Мэй Лань-фана», ГАРФ 5283-9-200.113-118.

16 Percy Chen (18 May 1935).

17 Barnes (17 March 1935).

18 Percy Chen (18 May 1935).

In short, when we make an effort to see through the official window dressing and focus our attention on what is dressed up, the main event within the event turns out not to be Mei Lanfang making his entrance on the Soviet stage dressed up as a woman, but the simultaneous return of the Chinese ambassador, Yan Huiqing, to the Soviet capital for reasons of state.

IN THE WINGS

That is not all. From his more discreet diplomatic position in the wings, Yan now had to swallow a very bitter pill served to him by his Soviet host. At this point Japan had advanced into part of Inner Mongolia, which was governed by China. In January 1935 it also claimed territory in Outer Mongolia, which was a Soviet protectorate and so a buffer state bordering the Japanese puppet regime in Manchuria.¹⁹ The Kremlin chose to back out. On the very day Mei Lanfang gave his first public performance in Moscow, on 23 March, the Soviet government – ignoring the vehement protests of the Chinese government – signed an agreement to sell the Russian-owned Chinese Eastern Railway to the Japanese puppet regime in Manchuria. The deal was paid for by Japan and was signed in the Tokyo house of the Japanese foreign minister.²⁰ Yan Huiqing had no illusions as to why: since the Japanese troops had already forced the Russians running the line to accept their making free military use of it, “the Soviet Government had no means of staving off its ultimate take over by the Japanese, unless it was prepared to go to war over the matter. This appeared to the Union to be hardly worthwhile. Forced to make a choice of two evils, the Soviet Union decided to sell the line to ‘Manchukuo’, meaning of course Japan.” On the other hand, “China, beyond registering her protests, had no effective remedy to protect her rights and interests,” Yan further regrets, and as a result “the confidence of our people in the much advertised honourable ideals of the new Russian regime and, in particular in her friendship for China, received a crude shock from the event.”²¹ With this the last remnant of the Soviet sphere of influence in the region disappeared. And there was still no Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact in sight.

IN CHINA MAO IS MARCHING, IN MOSCOW MEI LANFANG APPEARS

That is still not all. At the same time as the Soviet audiences enthusiastically applauded Mei Lanfang, the event which was really going to change China's course, the ‘Long March’, was taking place in almost total obscurity on the backstage: in remote rural China and completely neglected by the Kremlin.

Hard pressed by Chiang Kai-shek's army, in October 1934 Mao Zedong and his communist peasant army had to retreat from their rural base area in the province of Jiangxi and start out on the hazards of a ‘Long March’ toward the northern province of Shaanxi, where they were not to arrive until a year later. At their departure they only carried small radio equipment with a local range, and so were

19 *Известия* 25 January 1935. Quoted in: Aitchen K. Wu 1950, p. 225.

20 Yen 1940, p. 340. Aitchen K. Wu 1950, pp. 246-247. ‘23 Mar 1935 Agreement on sale of Chinese-Eastern railroad concluded between USSR and Manchow-Go.’, in: Crowley (ed.) 1970, p. 184.

21 Yen 1974, 209-210.

virtually cut off from the outside and no longer had radio contact with Moscow.²² On its way to the North, unknown to the outside world and bending the existing party rules of election, in January 1935 Mao's communist peasant army elected him as its military leader, and into the standing committee of the CCP Politburo.²³ The very moment when Mao Zedong successfully ended his 'Long March' and arrived in Shaanxi in October 1935, Soviet foreign policy towards China was to face a wholly new situation and balance of power.

SIGNING THE NON-AGGRESSION PACT, BUT WHICH?

The two emigre Russian historians, Heller and Nekrich (1986), simply sum up Stalin's mistaken policy vis-à-vis China like this: "Stalin did not believe a victory by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) was possible; his policy therefore was to collaborate with Chiang Kai-shek."²⁴ That is very true. Add to this his sharing the traditional Western view of the East: When Mei Lanfang appeared on the stage of history in Moscow, the more or less consciously intended propaganda effect was to serve up on its boards a weak and feminine feudal China to a superior and imperialistic Soviet macho culture.

There is no simple happy ending to my survey. Foreign affairs may be a fickle business: in foreign relations a state may back, or have to back, more horses than one.

Not until Germany and Japan signed an Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 (on 25 November), and the CCP and the GMD joined forces against Japan (late in December that year), did new possibilities for Sino-Russian cooperation open up.

In July 1937 the Japanese army besieged Beijing, and this time Chiang Kai-shek started to fight back in earnest. A Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was finally signed (in August 1937). However so was, two years later, a Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (on 23 August 1939), immediately after which the Kremlin cut back its assistance to China, established an immediate Soviet-Japanese cease-fire, and on 13 April 1941 signed a five-year neutrality agreement with Japan. The subsequent war events soon again reshuffled those alliances.

Mei Lanfang managed to refuse to perform for the Japanese by retiring from the stage and growing a moustache. He did not remove it until after Japan's surrender in 1945. When the subsequent Chinese civil war ended with the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's GMD army and a communist takeover of mainland China, Mei chose to stay and participate in the official inauguration of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In his published reminiscences about his Soviet tour he keeps within the limits of the PRC perspective and consequently neither refers to GMD or to Yan Huiqing (I hope to have demonstrated here the historiographic

22 Braun 1973, 111, 125. Braun 1982, 79, 90. 'Top secret. To Com. Stalin. The radio communications between the Comintern and the CC CCP, which were interrupted when the bulk of the Chinese Red Army forces left Jiangxi and Fujian in October 1934, have been re-established over the Comintern radio transmitters.', undated letter from Dimitrov [early in July 1936] to Stalin, translated in: (Dallin & Firsov eds. 2000, 96).

23 Braun 1973, 144, 178-179. Braun 1982, 104, 130-131. Kuo 1975, 60. Carr 1982, 371-375. Shum 1988, 47.

24 Heller and Nekrich 1986, 566.

advantages of examining the hows and whys of such contending contextual and historical narratives). Mei returned to the Soviet Union for the first time since 1935 as a member of a cultural delegation representing the new PRC and – as chance would have it – arriving at what was to become a historical watershed: he arrived just two months before Stalin died in 1953. In 1961 Mei died of a heart attack in Beijing and so – once again as chance would have it – was spared the experience of becoming a target of the violent attacks against his theatre tradition during the Cultural Revolution.

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