













Category: Arts and Humanities

REVIEW

Philosophical understanding of Russian-language poetry of Central Asia and the East

Comprensión filosófica de la poesía en lengua rusa de Asia Central y el Este

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the cultures of Central Asia have been intertwined with Russian culture for many centuries. Many Russian-speaking poets of this region have left a serious contribution to the development of several cultures at the same time.

Objectives: the aim of this study is to identify the main philosophical meanings and contexts that unite the creative heritage of Russian-speaking poets of Central Asia and the Far East.

Methods: to achieve this goal, the historical method, comparative method, and hermeneutic analysis are used. The authors of the article also refer to the concept of archetypes, introduced into literary studies from the psychoanalytical approach.

Results: in the course of the study, it is determined that many Russian-speaking poets of these regions adopted the Asian cultural code, in connection with which the themes of “the call of the Motherland”, “metaphysics of the Great Steppe”, “Eastern City”, nomadic way of life, as well as a special, close to Asian, perception of time and eternity appear in their texts. These archetypes were added to Russian culture mainly under the influence of Eastern trends and the activities of emigrant and bilingual poets.

Conclusions: the study contributes to the study of Russian-language poetry, as well as the poetic field of Central Asia and the Far East. It also touches upon the theme of the peculiarities of the formation of the writer’s identity in a bilingual environment and the theme of the dialogue of cultures, interethnic exchange of cultural code.

Keywords: Multilingualism; Literature; Poetry; Central Asia; Narration.

RESUMEN

Introducción: las culturas de Asia Central han estado entrelazadas con la cultura rusa durante muchos siglos. Muchos poetas de habla rusa de esta región han dejado una seria contribución al desarrollo de varias culturas al mismo tiempo.

Método: el objetivo de este estudio es identificar los principales significados y contextos filosóficos que unen el legado creativo de los poetas de habla rusa de Asia Central y el Lejano Oriente. Para lograr este objetivo, se utilizan el método histórico, el método comparativo y el análisis hermenéutico. Los autores del artículo también se refieren al concepto de arquetipos, introducido en los estudios literarios desde el enfoque psicoanalítico.

Resultados: en el transcurso del estudio, se determina que muchos poetas de habla rusa de estas regiones adoptaron el código cultural asiático, en conexión con lo cual aparecen en sus textos temas como “el llamado de la Patria”, “metafísica de la Gran Estepa”, “ciudad oriental”, estilo de vida nómada, así como

una percepción especial, cercana a la asiática, del tiempo y la eternidad. Estos arquetipos se agregaron a la cultura rusa principalmente bajo la influencia de las tendencias orientales y las actividades de poetas emigrantes y bilingües.

Conclusión: el estudio contribuye al estudio de la poesía en lengua rusa, así como al campo poético de Asia Central y el Lejano Oriente. También aborda la temática de las peculiaridades de la formación de la identidad del escritor en un entorno bilingüe y el tema del diálogo entre culturas, el intercambio interétnico de códigos culturales.

Palabras clave: Multilingüismo; Literatura; Poesía; Asia Central; Narración.

INTRODUCTION

Kyrgyzstan, like other young states of Central Asia, is at the stage of forming its cultural space. This stage also includes the formation of local identities. The Central Asian monolinguals are united by both national and religious (Islam) factors. Bilinguals, including literati, are at the intersection of the Islamic world and Russian culture. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider those cultural forms and narratives that are generated by being at the intersection of the two civilizations. Russian-language poetry of Central Asia and the Far East is relatively poorly studied, as researchers from the Russian Federation emphasize the study of poets from the European part of their state, while Central Asian literary scholars study poetry in their national language.

Different researchers have already approached this topic from different angles. Thus, D. Rashidova, in her study, touches upon the topic of poetry of A. Feinberg, describing him as a Russian poet with an Uzbek heart.

⁽¹⁾ The author notes that A. Feinberg was inspired by the culture and nature of Uzbekistan in his work, he also adopted a part of the local mentality: openness of mental impulses, thoughtfulness, love to observe the world and thirst for harmony and peace. The study reveals many subjects of A. Feinberg's work, but does not exhaust them, and also does not give any general characteristics of Russian-language poetry of Central Asia and the East, a specific poet is important for the author. In the current study, it is necessary to compare A. Feinberg's work with other Russian-speaking authors of these regions.

G.A. Abylkassimova investigated the creativity of the Russian-speaking poet of Kazakhstan, Olzhas Suleimenov. ⁽²⁾ The author focused on the image of Makhambet and the narrative that O. Suleimenov creates around him. According to the author, this story describes the national spirit of Kazakhs, and other peoples of Central Asia. His work shows that Russian, which is universal enough to create a wide poetic palette of images, can be used to describe this national spirit. The current study should also consider other works by O. Suleimenov and other authors of the "Russian-speaking East".

N.A. Manichkin devoted his study to the reinterpretation of images from the historical memory of the peoples of Kazakhstan in poetic creativity. ⁽³⁾ The author singles out recurring symbols, passing from verse to verse, and extracts from this the characteristic features of Kazakh poetry. Such images are the Motherland, field, mountains, expanses, tigers, and many others. The author touches upon the work of poets writing their poems both in Kazakh and Russian. The current study takes exclusively Russian-language texts by writers of Central Asia and the Far East, and it is on their basis that the key philosophical narratives are comprehended. Kazakh novels of the second half of the twentieth century have been studied by Sh. Ismailova and Zh. Bayanbayeva. ⁽⁴⁾ The authors emphasized the mythopoetic content of the works and described characteristic narratives from this prose, embodying the Kazakh collective unconscious. Also, prose, but specifically the prose of B. Suleimenov, was studied by T.S. Izmahan and G.Zh. Orda. ⁽⁵⁾ In their opinion, national narratives are very much alive in the texts of fairy tales, even when they are modern fairy tales.

Thus, the aim of the current study was to systematize information about Russian-language poets from Central Asia and the Far East, highlighting the key narratives of their work. It was also necessary to draw conclusions about the ways in which this work simultaneously gives content to both Russian and local culture.

METHOD

The study was conducted within the framework of a hermeneutic approach - the texts of Russian-speaking authors of Central Asia and the Far East were read. The emphasis of the study was on highlighting cultural codes, narratives, and archetypes that were common to both the writer and the reader. The historical method was used to collect data on Russian-speaking poets of Central Asia. This information has been systematized, structured, and reconstructed in the text in an order that depends on regions and chronology. The comparative method was also used to trace the dynamics of narrative changes in the work of Russian-speaking poets of Asian regions. Comparison of different periods of Russian-language poetry of the Asian region made it possible to identify key narratives that are connected with the basis of the cultural code and do not change over time, to separate them from temporary, momentary themes. The study concentrates on poets of the XX-XXI and does

not include consideration of the work of past centuries, as the liveliest cultural exchange between Central Asia and Russia began in the XX century.

The study applied some elements of psychoanalytical approach, for example, analysing archetypes of analytical psychology. Poets expressed in their work their deepest images and aspirations, which are connected both with their personal experience and with the collective unconscious, including the collective memory that people carry from generation to generation. Such images, embodied in specific poetic figures, have been labelled ‘archetypes’, and were identified in the current study, through a psychoanalytic approach.

Hermeneutics allows identifying key, recurring narratives, and discovering their meaning: both surface and deep layers. Hermeneutic analysis also allowed delving into the cultural codes of different peoples and civilizations. The structural method was also applied in the study. Russian-language poems written in Central Asia and the Far East were considered together, united by one structure - the Russian-language literary field. The application of this method made it possible to identify themes and images common to all unique poems.

RESULTS

The Russian, being one of the languages of international communication, unites many writers from the Eurasian space - writers from Russia itself, from other post-Soviet states, and Russian-speaking emigrants settled in the United States, the European Union, Israel, and other regions. Russian plays a special role in Central Asia, where it has long been, along with local languages, the main language of dissemination of science and art. Now it is still passed on from generation to generation through family upbringing.⁽⁶⁾ Historical contacts between Russian and Asian culture began as early as the contacts between Russia and Finno-Ugric peoples. However, as the Empire expanded, these contacts increased, and the points of intersection between cultures became more and more. Thus, it is possible to distinguish four historical periods, in which one or another degree of development received Russian-language poetry among Asian peoples. The first stage is the early one, during this period, many Russian poets visited Asia and sang about it alongside Russia itself, but did not adopt Asian identities.⁽⁷⁾ This stage lasted until the Civil War in the Russian Empire.

The February Revolution and the Civil War led to the fact that many Russians had to leave the country - it is going about the “white emigration”. There are many studies devoted to the “white emigration” in the West, but the work of “white” poets who settled in the East is less well known. The third stage began after the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the development of national identity among Asian peoples. Thus, at this stage, many works appear in the languages of Central Asia. A significant part of the population of this region, although “absorbing” the local identity, considered Russian to be their native language and chose it for their creative work. Some of them had an excellent command of local languages, but wanted to convey their Asian world-view to a wider audience, so they wrote both in their native language and in Russian, which united the whole huge state.⁽⁸⁾

The fourth stage is modernity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has become an even more multinational region, with different peoples living side by side. The Russian language remains very common, and many local poets continue to write in Russian.⁽⁹⁾

Russian-language poetry in Central Asia and China

Travelling to Central Asia and living there strongly influenced the work of M. Voloshin, K. Lipskerov, E. Yashnov. N. Gumilev praised these regions. The first full-fledged Russian-speaking literary school in the East was formed in China, and the reason for this was the defeat of the White Guards in the Civil War. Many of them, together with their families, moved to China. The main part settled in Harbin.⁽¹⁰⁾ The main motifs of the “Harbin School” were grief for the past times and bitterness from the defeat in the Civil War. Sometimes these feelings were expressed in an ironic form, sometimes in frankly dramatic poems. Also, palpable was the poets’ desire to return to their homeland. The “Harbin School” - Russian poets who praised the hospitable Asia that gave them refuge, and sought common ground between it and their home, Russia. A list of the names of other Asian-related poets can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Russian-speaking poets of Central Asia and the East

Region	Poets
Kazakhstan	O.O. Suleimenov, P.N. Vasiliev, G.D. Grebenshchikov, Yu.V. Grunin, Yu.O. Dombrovsky, M.F. Ivanusiev-Altaysky, B.G. Kairbekov, B.M. Kanapyanov, P.N. Kuznetsov, D.F. Snegin
Uzbekistan	R.H. Farhadi, A.A. Fainberg, N.N. Krasilnikov, S. Abdukakhkhar, E.V. Abdullaev, Sh.M. Abdullaev, B.A. Akhmedov
Harbin (China)	V.F. Pereleshin, V.K. Obukhov, N.V. Peterts, Yu.V. Krusenstern-Peterets, M.A. Shmeiser, L.N. Andersen, N. Ilnek, A.I. Nesmelov, A. Andreeva, A.A. Achair
Other	V.I. Shapovalov (Kyrgyzstan), T.K. Zulfikarova (Tajikistan)

The situation is different with the Central Asian region and the poets who appeared there throughout the twentieth century. Many of them were bilinguals, so they enriched several cultures with their poems. This was vividly expressed in his poem “What to please my heart?” by O. Suleimenov: “I am Chokan! Confucius, Blok, Tagore...! I agree to be Buddha, Sesshu and the pagan Saul...”⁽¹¹⁾ Central Asian intellectuals keenly felt that they were at the intersection of cultures and tried to embody all their richness in their works.⁽¹²⁾ It is O. Suleimenov who embodied the intersection of two cultures most fully among Kazakh writers. On the one hand, he was a native Kazakh with all inherent mental features. On the other hand, he also explored classical Russian literature, defending the hypothesis of its proximity to the archetypes of the Turkic world. One can describe the essence of Central Asian literature by calling it “the poetry of the silk road”, because it has been shaped for many centuries in the Europe-China-Muslim world triangle.⁽¹³⁾

Philosophical narratives of “eastern” Russian-language poetry

Both emigrant poets and Central Asian bilinguals converge in many of the narratives of their works. The current study identifies five such key themes: the “call of the homeland”, the “metaphysics of the Great Steppe”, the Asian perception of time and the fate of man in that time (and his temporality), the urbanity of the Eastern city, and the aesthetics of nomadic life. All these themes are characteristic, firstly, of the Asian cultural field.⁽¹⁴⁾ However, Russian-speaking poets have incorporated these motifs into Russian culture, thus making it truly Eurasian. The theme of homeland is very important in both Asian cultures and Russian culture at the same time. For bilingual poets, this theme becomes acute because of their bifurcated identities: their homelands are both in Central Asia and Russia.⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus, a vivid example of Central Asian poets’ praise of the homeland is A. Feinberg’s lines:

“A sad land. But this is where
I came from, where I am and where I will be.
Europe! I don’t know you.
In the distance, the eagle circles silently.
A blade of grass in my teeth. Salt in my eyes.
A moment of sorrow and a moment of happiness.”⁽¹⁶⁾

The theme of the homeland received a special specificity in the “poets of Harbin”, i.e. in the white emigration in China. The theme of “lost paradise” with memories of the Russian Empire is noticeable here. In some poems there is a theme of shame for the defeat in the Civil War and hatred for the Red Army who “took away the Motherland”. The emigrant poets realized their desire to see their homeland by describing it in their works. For them, China itself serves only as a temporary shelter, a refuge until the day when Russia will once again call them under its banner. Based on the concept of the German philosopher M. Heidegger, poetic texts concentrate the very essence of being, including national being.^(17,18) The ontology of the poetry of the European part of Russia and the Russian-language poetry of Asia are fundamentally different. In the first case, the symbolism of the Russian Orthodox city, Russian village, forest, or forest-steppe zone manifests itself. This landscape itself contains the image of “cultivated” nature, nature that has already been touched by civilization. The opposite situation is with Russian-language poetry of the Great Steppe. For example, in the poem of P. Vasiliev:

“And there, in the foothills of the Altai Mountains,
We’ll be guests at the right time.
A simple steppe girl
In her native village will meet us.
And at the hour when the fog falls
A wide-winged flock will descend,
We’ll drink thick and drunk.
In sacks of raging koumiss.”⁽¹⁹⁾

The psychological construct of time in European and Asian culture is very different from each other. Eastern culture is more characterized by a cyclical perception of the world and respect for eternity. European culture is conditioned by the eschatological essence of Abrahamic religions.⁽²⁰⁾ Central Asia certainly belongs to the Abrahamic religions. However, cultural exchange with China and the heritage of local folk religious cults have all created a specific perception of time that combines both cyclicity and a logical finale in the form of the Apocalypse. The Russian-speaking poets of Central Asia are closer to the European perception of time, but the motifs of the Asian perception of temporality are especially tangible in such bilinguals who have retained a strong local identity. For example, in the work by O. Suleimenov:

“Only in comparison with the past does the present live,
your sullen camel reminded me of a tertiary foot-and-mouth disease.
There is a log of baobab and therefore there is a thread,
There is no matter at all if there is nothing to compare it with.
Only in comparison with the small
is man great,
only in comparison with the great
is a man alive.”⁽¹¹⁾

In general, however, this perception of time is an attitude of treating the person in it as a “tourist of being-in-the-world”.⁽²¹⁾ The persistent sense of temporality of everything is a characteristic feature of Asian culture and Russian-language poetry, which has absorbed this culture. The aesthetics of the eastern city with its specific way of life has taken the most important place in the Russian-language poetry of Central Asia and in the “Harbin poets”. A vivid example is the lines of P. Vasiliev:

“Nomads are drinking with us under the canopy,
And the sunset is moderately calm and scarlet,
While under the first red express.
And the bridge with its first joy trembled.
While, with a long, camel-like roar.
The city looks back.
But we’ll make you thrice new,
The old city of the Seven Chambers!”⁽¹⁹⁾

The Oriental image that reflects man’s place in the world is the nomad. Thus, poetry itself becomes for the Asian writer a temporary dwelling, i.e. lines in which he can find the fullness of himself at the moment.⁽²²⁾ This loneliness is evident, for example, in the lines of D.F. Snegin:

“I learnt the art of Listening for a long time,
The craft of Silence did not come to me all of a sudden.
But under the moon I learnt from the Wolf.
Worthy of the proud sorrow to become.”⁽²³⁾

DISCUSSION

Thus, the current study highlights the narratives of the call of the Motherland, the metaphysics of the Great Steppe, the Eastern city, the special perception of time and the nomadic way of life. All these narratives do not simply influence the plot of the works, but affect the existential experience of life by the authors. Poetry in Russian was an opportunity for them to popularize their cultural narratives to a wider audience. The phenomenon of bilingual Estonian poetry has been studied by S.L. Linno and L. Lukas.⁽²⁴⁾ Many Estonian poets write their works in both Estonian and Russian. The ideas and symbolism of such poems combine Estonian and Russian cultural codes. The situations in Estonia and Central Asia are similar, as in both cases the strong legacy of the USSR is felt. On the other hand, the differences between Russian culture and Central Asian culture are more significant, which makes the dual identity of local bilingual poets more pronounced.

Using African literature as an example, S.A. Obi and D. Adanna examined the links between language and literary identity.⁽²⁵⁾ The authors emphasize that many writers on the African continent are multilingual - they use local languages and French/English/other languages of former colonial empires equally for their work. The study examines the social significance of multilingual literature. It is indicated that it fosters friendlier relations between neighbouring peoples. The current article confirms the hypothesis of the social significance of polylingual literature. For example, the harmonious coexistence of peoples in the USSR for a long time was ensured by precisely such cultural ties. B. Benzehaf explored multilingualism through the prism of the role it plays in shaping a person’s identity.⁽²⁶⁾ The study shows that deep knowledge of another language creates a specific intercultural identity, and sometimes even provides an opportunity to redefine oneself. In the educational process, language learning is important for applying the most complex and effective didactic practices.^(27,28)

T. Layden⁽²⁹⁾ touches upon the diasporas of Western and Eastern countries in her work. The topic of Russians in Harbin, which regionally coincides with the topic of the current study, is particularly deeply revealed. They hardly adopted local customs and traditions, maintaining only Russian identity. M. Taroutina studied Russian culture through a special prism - the author considered it as a point of intersection between Eastern and Western cultures.⁽³⁰⁾ This study allows better understanding the “Westernness” and “Orientalism” of Russian

culture itself. The case of Russian Orientalism was strong in the Russian Empire and remained so during the Soviet era.^(31,32) The study provides a better understanding of the connections between Russian and Orientalism, which opens up the possibility of a better interpretation of the layers of meaning in Russian-language Orientalist poetry. The current study also considers not the entire Russian-speaking culture as a whole, but exclusively one aspect of it - poetry. It can be said that Russian literature is a whole literary field in which various forms of Russian mentality neighbour. Thus, the poets of the European part of Russia were closer to European culture and its narratives, while the Russian literati of Central Asia stably transmitted Eurasian, if not Asian, perceptions of the world and society.

T.B. Kyzy and U. Unal examined the work of Ch. Aitmatov as a Russian-speaking cultural “diplomat” of the Turkic world.⁽³³⁾ According to the researchers, the writer’s work was not Russian in the full sense of the word. It was devoted to the dissemination and popularization of the semantic field of the Turkic peoples. Ch. Aitmatov was not a poet, but his work had a huge influence on the Russian-speaking writers of the East of the XX century, and still has it to this day. He can be called the embodiment of Russian-speaking Turkic civilization. The current study shows that a writer can simultaneously enter several literary fields, and Ch. Aitmatov is both a “diplomat” of Russian culture and a “diplomat” of Turkic culture. In his work, although it is not poetry, the same cultural codes and narratives clearly manifest themselves: starting from the Asian perception of time and eternity, ending with a special landscape, glorification of the eastern city and the aesthetics of the nomadic way of life.

The concept of “Eurasian culture” was explored by L. Feldman.⁽³⁴⁾ The author points out that the universality of Eurasian culture has already been formed, and in it Russian culture gathers around itself European and Asian languages, works of art. The researcher makes a greater bias towards the political future of this concept. The current study, however, supports the idea that Russian culture is enriched with oriental motifs. One of the sources of this enrichment is Central Asia.

A. Libman and A. Obydenkova consider the concept of “Eurasianism” from a different angle - in their opinion, the birth of this civilizational identity was possible due to the “century of the USSR”.⁽³⁵⁾ During the period of the existence of this state, according to the authors, Russian and Asian culture became so close that it is an exaggeration to speak of Russian culture as European.^(36, 37) The current study confirms this thesis by revealing the serious influence of Russian-speaking authors of Central Asia on the whole Russian-speaking literary field.

Thus, the work of Russian-speaking poets of Central Asia and the “Harbin school” needs further research. However, the phenomenon of bilingualism of Central Asian literature has already been considered by many researchers. Thus, dual identity, with the preponderance of national identity, was found in the legacy of Ch. Aitmatov. Based on the current study, the bilingual poets of the region, such as O. Suleimenov, played a similar role of “Asia’s diplomats of culture”. The work of these writers not only popularizes the cultures of the East, but also fills Russian culture with Eurasian content.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian-speaking literary field is not limited to the territory of the Russian Federation and includes many subjects: emigrant writers (settled in the West and the East), Russian-speakers and bilinguals from other post-Soviet republics. Thus, the current study identifies two categories of Russian-language poetry from Central Asia and the East: the “Harbin literary group” (which unites all Russian-language literati from China in the first half of the twentieth century) and Central Asian bilinguals.

The main narratives prominent in Russian-language poetry of Asia are the call of the Motherland, the metaphysics of the Great Steppe, the Asian perception of time and eternity, the Eastern urban space, and the nomadic way of life. The call of the Motherland is a particular form of patriotic consciousness that has been confronted with globalization that erases regional identities. The Metaphysics of the Great Steppe is a particular landscape of Asian poetry that leads to particular ontological views. The problem of time is tied to Asian culture’s special respect for eternity and the perception of time as a constant repetition of the same. Descriptions of the Oriental city and the nomadic way of life are standard for Asian poetry - the dichotomy of community and the basic existential loneliness of each person.

Thus, Russian-speaking poets, despite their close ties to Russian culture and their contribution to its development, have a dual identity. They are, at the same time, both part of Russian civilization and “ambassadors”, “diplomats” of the East, disseminating local narratives in the language of world communication. This dual identity was formed during the Soviet era and is now successfully maintained in the secular states of Central Asia. An exception is the “Harbin literary group”, which kept one identity - Russian - and did not blur in Chinese culture. Moreover, even the partial integration of Chinese cultural narratives in the “Harbinians” is faintly visible.

The current study can be developed further: to identify the specificity of narratives of Russian-speaking authors from different sub-regions of Central Asia, as well as to describe in more detail the specific narratives of the “Harbin school” and other Far Eastern Russian-speaking poets. The results of the study can be applied to

the study of Russian-language prose from Asian post-Soviet states.

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