

especially as these directors generally have limited opportunity to significantly shape these films. These qualms aside, Chu's work brings a major development in Chinese cinema to broader attention and is exemplary in its reference to an impressive range of sources, which testify to a near encyclopaedic knowledge of China's and especially Hong Kong's cinematic output, as well as the rapidly increasing scholarship on these topics.

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I HUGO TIERNY

is a PhD candidate in military history and international relations at the EPHE (École Pratique des Hautes Études) and the ICP (Institut Catholique de Paris). Les Patios Saint-Jacques, 4-14 Rue Ferrus, 75014 Paris (EPHE); 21 Rue d'Assas, 75006 Paris (ICP), France (hugotierny59@gmail.com).

The West has pushed Russia's back up against the wall." This sally uttered at the beginning of the war in Ukraine by Hua Chunying 華春瑩, spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is a good illustration of the current proximity between China and Russia. Western strategies have long counted on a façade of friendship, a marriage of reason that hides suspicion and rivalry between Beijing and Moscow. However, for Alexander Korolev, professor at the University of New South Wales and educated in Nanjing and Hong Kong, there is no doubt that the Sino-Russian partnership is structural. He proves this by reviewing the development of the alignment between China and Russia since the fall of the USSR, with reference to official sources and Chinese and Russian archives, illustrating his arguments with a series of clear schematic graphs and tables.

Korolev's first aim is to demonstrate the solidity of Sino-Russian relations, some of which go beyond the framework of more formal alliances despite the absence of a defence pact. The second is to put forward a new theoretical framework for the phenomenon of "alignment" in international relations, the absence or conceptual vagueness of which Korolev deplores in the literature. On the basis of this, the author believes that the strategic alignment between China and Russia will endure, since it is motivated by systemic rather than conjunctural factors.

The work is composed of seven chapters, with the first and last forming the introduction and conclusion. Chapters One and Two present the conceptual context of the study based on a comprehensive survey of the literature, in which well-known names in the theory of alliances (Waltz, Walt, Wilkins) intersect with those of French researchers (Tertrais, Niquet). This clear theoretical framework highlights the absence of an objective method of measuring alignments in foreign affairs. To fill this gap, Korolev suggests a series of military, economic, and diplomatic indicators divided into progressive levels of intensity. He notes that an alignment does not require an alliance, the advantage of which is above all to make official an existing strategic understanding. "To align oneself" would therefore indicate a less formal, but highly structural reality since it is founded on common interests and shared perceptions of the balance of power and international threats. This new tool, tested on the Sino-Russian alignment, might be applied to other situations such as the explicit relationship that exists between Taiwan and the United States, or the vaguer relationship between Iran and China.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five consist of a more empirical demonstration. Korolev first shows how the alignment between China and Russia has progressed since 1990. The interdependence between Moscow and Beijing followed the settling of border issues, and arms sales between the two countries. It was built upon exchanges of military technologies and the integration of their industrial defence bases, ambitious joint exercises that showed a growing level of interoperability between their armed forces, and collaborative projects for the joint development of an early warning system. This all suggests political will and a high level of confidence as well as the premise of an integrated defence policy. For Korolev, even though this progress has been made without a defence pact, the latter is unnecessary since it is already taking shape at a technical level whilst its absence offers flexibility to Moscow and Beijing.

Chapter Four continues by emphasising the concerted opposition of Russia and China to a unipolar world order dominated by the United States, their shared interest in pushing back this influence on their geographical margins, and their joint perception of a military threat towards them on the part of Washington. For Korolev, these elements of rapprochement are systemic and have certainly reached the point of no return. Korolev also questions the geostrategic justification for an American international policy in conflict with both Moscow and Beijing and which strengthens an axis of resistance on which cumulative military spending is close to that of the United States in terms of purchasing power parity. Although the author does not pass judgement on a Western policy justified by Russian and Chinese military movements, the war in Ukraine

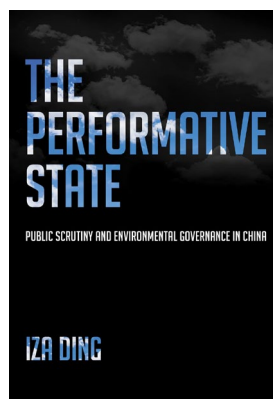
reinforces the intensity of a confrontation between two fronts.

In the following chapter, Korolev checks the robustness of these links by analysing the progression of economic relations and the similarity of Russian and Chinese diplomatic positions at the UN. He concludes that Beijing has shown a certain desire to reassure Moscow by working to balance their trade, since Russia is dependent on its exports of raw materials and China dominates manufacturing exchanges. Moreover, the author notes that as a result of its progressive isolation since the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, Moscow has had no option but to accept a subordinate role to Beijing. As for the positions of the two capitals at the UN, since the 2000s they show an increasing convergence that reveals their common concerns and interests. In Chapter Six, Korolev tests his method on the Indo-American alignment and estimates that it lags behind that of Moscow and Beijing in systemic, military, economic, and diplomatic terms.

The study is very coherent, and the more empirical sections (Chapters Three to Seven) are accessible for non-specialists. Nevertheless, Korolev might perhaps have given more space to Central Asia, hitherto the preserve of Russia and where the economic and security influence of China are being reinforced. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and Vladimir Putin's discourse on the relative sovereignty of Kazakhstan, have made waves in the region, and a Chinese about-turn cannot be discounted. Beijing's interests in the region are emphasised, however, and the book would seem to precede the intervention of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation in Kazakhstan (CSTO) in early 2022. It would nonetheless be interesting for a future study to obtain an analysis of the way in which Moscow perceives its decline in Central Asia in favour of China, and the impact of this backward step and the war in Ukraine on the Sino-Russian partnership.

At the end of the book, Korolev proposes that Washington should explore certain grounds for understanding with Moscow, following the line of least resistance in order to prevent the Sino-Russian alignment from developing into a symbiosis. Although this mission would seem more complicated than ever in the context of the escalation in Ukraine, Korolev's analysis gives us a keen sense of a Sino-Russian understanding that involves geostrategic choices that are extremely difficult for the West.

Translated by Elizabeth Guill.



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The Performative State: Public Scrutiny and Environmental Governance in China.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

I VIRGINIE ARANTES

is a Wiener-Anspach postdoctoral fellow at the School of Global and Area Studies and a Wolfson College junior research fellow at the University of Oxford. University of Oxford, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, Bevington Road, Oxford, OX2 6LH, United Kingdom (virginie.arantes@area.ox.ac.uk).

Iza Ding's *The Performative State* is essential reading for those wanting to learn more about the less visible reality of the daily challenges faced by street-level environmental bureaucrats in China. It lends flesh and blood to a phrase I encountered repeatedly in China in the mid-2010s when interviewing environmental activists: "Well, there is the law, but then there is the application of the law in dealing with pollution cases." Ding's rich and in-depth observations transport readers back to the "airpocalypse" hailstorm and anti-corruption episodes of 2013, when she began her field research in Lakeville, a bustling and developed city on China's central coast. Given the developed context of Lakeville, Ding anticipated that bureaucratic behaviour would be all the more apt to achieve substantive governance, a "governance that is geared towards delivering the fruits of effective rule that people demand and deserve" (p. 7). In fact, it is recognised that authoritarian regimes like China often rely on performance legitimacy (Gilley 2009; Holbig and Gilley 2010; Zhu 2011). If they cannot meet people's demands such as economic growth or a healthy environment, the regime could be undermined by popular dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, Ding didn't find that. What Ding found instead, and this is the book's central claim, is that high levels of "external scrutiny" by the public, coupled with the bureaucracy's low logistical and/or political capacity, led bureaucrats not to deploy substantive governance, but to resort to performative governance, a "deployment of visual, verbal, and gestural symbols of good governance for the audience of citizens" (p. 7).

The book illuminates the theatrical side of environmental governance in everyday Chinese politics. The author bases her definition of performativity on Merriam-Webster's definition of performative as a means of image cultivation or the conveying of positive impressions, but also on Judith Butler's understanding of performativity as language, gesture, and all sorts of symbolic