

***Fashion East: The Spectre that Haunted Socialism.* By Djurdja Bartlett. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010. Xii, 326 pp. Notes. References. Index. Color Illustrations. Black and White Illustrations. \$34.95, Cloth.**

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Fashion East is an immensely refreshing read for someone who does not know much about socialist fashion in the Soviet Union and East Europe. As someone who knows a thing or two about socialist fashion in China, I am amazed by how few parallels there were between China and the Soviet Union and the East European countries Barlett discusses in the book, especially with respect to women's fashion. Compared to women's fashion in the Maoist China (1949-1976), which was much more proletarian and androgynous, women's fashion in the Soviet Union and East Europe looked categorically bourgeois, feminine, beautiful, and at times luxurious.

Based on mostly archival materials, such as women's magazines, fashion magazines, etiquette books, and socialist manuals on dress, supplemented by the author's interviews with fashion designers and editors in the former Soviet Union and the republics of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, and Yugoslavia, Djurdja Bartlett chronicles three phases of socialist fashion: utopian dress, state-sanctioned socialist fashion, and everyday fashion. Utopian dress came about in the post-revolutionary Soviet Russia and at a much later time in East Europe. With its modernist and constructivist aesthetic, utopian dress was designed to make a clean break with the pre-socialist past. When Stalin came to power in the late 1920s, a state-sanctioned socialist fashion began to develop (once again, socialist fashion came about at a later time in East Europe, and so was the "everyday fashion"). The Stalinist socialist fashion was characterized by slow-changing, modest clothing that was hampered by a centralized planned production and distribution economic system on the one hand (which was in fact similar to what happened in China during the Maoist era), and a mythical, grandiose style clothing that largely existed in the form of "prototypes" on the other hand. While the modest clothing served the practical and functional purposes, the Stalinist grandiose style clothing was designed to create a representation of an "advanced" socialist society. Yet, both styles were ideologically correct and hence reflected the "socialist good taste." Also common between the seemingly diverging styles of the socialist fashion was a shared fear of capricious fashion changes, which was carefully regulated by the centrally-controlled fashion institutions. "Everyday fashion" began to emerge as the socialist regimes abandoned harsh repression and became more tolerant of individualized sartorial expressions in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Leading the charge towards "everyday fashion" was what Bartlett calls the "socialist middle classes," including social arrivistes, members of the old bourgeoisie, and the petit bourgeois strata (p.182). As these new socialist middle classes became more influential both economically and politically, Western fashions

were increasingly channeled into the Soviet Union and East Europe, which eventually led to apparently widespread unofficial consumerism of modernist fashions through a myriad of ways of self-provisioning. Contrary to the common belief of the triviality of fashion to socialism, Bartlett's account narrates a nuanced evolution of the socialist regimes' attitudes toward fashion, from total rejection to grudging acceptance in exchange for political loyalty, and to creeping consumerism. As suggested by the apt subtitle, fashion dogged socialism until the collapse of the Soviet Union and East Europe.

While Barlett did a fine job illustrating the broad changes in the socialist countries in question via clothing and fashion sensibilities, at times I wished for a little more social history. For example, she says, “[T]he socialist middle classes...gradually turned into a new bourgeoisie” (p.11). It would be extremely interesting to explicate a little more on whether or how fashion sensibilities extended to other realms of the social life. To a reader who do not know much about socialism or know more about socialism in other countries such as China, such contextualization of the labels of middle class or bourgeoisie would be very helpful. In socialist China under Mao, for example, people would have no idea what middle class meant, and the label of the bourgeoisie would conjure up the horror of class struggles.

With images galore and clear writing, the book will certainly have a broad appeal to scholars and students who are interested in fashion and gender, fashion and politics, and the socialist history in general in the Soviet Union and East Europe.