

*Bastid-Bruguière M.*<sup>1</sup>

## **In Memory of Sergei Toroptsev**

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It is so sad in the early dawn of an ominous Snake year to know that Sergei Toroptsev passed away. He always impressed me, and many of his overseas friends and colleagues around the world, as a true incarnation of the best-written and moving characters in the works of Chekhov, Dostoevsky or Tolstoy: a selfless, sincere person, imbued with the milk of human kindness, and with an open forceful mind striving for true and full knowledge in his field of special interest, which was the beauty and richness of Chinese poetry.

The first time I met Sergei Toroptsev was in Moscow, in November 1995, when Academician Mikhail Titarenko invited me to receive an honorary doctorate at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies. Sergei's wife, Nina Borevskaya, was already a friend of mine because of our common interest in Chinese educational reform and our involvement in the European Association of Chinese studies. She kindly invited me to their home where the three of us shared a long, enthralling conversation on literature and societies across the Eurasian continent. However, the high point of our encounters was in early December 2012, when they visited Paris together. Nina attended a UNESCO meeting as member of the Governing Board. Sergei was invited by a research network on Artistic languages: Asia and the West, headed by Professor Véronique Alexandre Journeau, sponsored by the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), that linked several research teams of the CNRS itself, of Paris III University, Paris IV University, Paris VII University, of Lyon II University, Lyon III University and of Lille University. In the morning of December 4, at the premises of Paris VII University, he gave a lecture in Russian entitled *Li Bo, Mozart of Chinese poetry?* It was translated into French, made available through videoconference to scholars in Lyon and Lille, and followed by a rich discussion with the audience hosted by Rémi Mathieu, senior researcher at the CNRS, himself an outstanding translator of ancient Chinese poetry and Classics.<sup>2</sup> In the afternoon, there was a workshop on comparative translation study of

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Bastide-Brugier is a French sinologist, Member of the Institute of France.

<sup>2</sup> The announcement and a brief account of the lecture are available online at: <https://langarts.hypotheses.org/225>

Excerpts of the videoconference can be found at: [https://lacas.inalco.fr/portals/html/resource\\_339623745/resource\\_762867076.html?portalURL=https://](https://lacas.inalco.fr/portals/html/resource_339623745/resource_762867076.html?portalURL=https://)

poetry. It was joined by Frank Kraushaar, Professor of Chinese literature at Tallinn University, together with several members of the research network, and chaired by Florence Lautel-Ribstein, a specialist on translation of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century English literature at Artois University. She introduced her own research on the history, theory and practice of translation, then the discussion focused on comparing translations of the same text in various European languages, using the Chinese poems that Sergei Toroptsev had discussed in his lecture. The exchange resulted in working out what was thought a rather adequate French version of some of the poems to be published together with a translation of the lecture. The ideas brought forward in this brainstorming have inspired many of later later writings of the participants.

Two days later, he and Nina came to my home for dinner, and we had a long good talk about the past, present and future, literature and history in the various countries of the world. They had a few more days enjoying museums and castles around Paris. Then we kept writing to each other, and I was also aware of the work Sergei was doing from the news in the Chinese press.

They moved to Israel in February 2014. But we saw each other in Moscow in 2016 where we attended a conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies. I knew that the Anthology of Medieval Chinese Poetry was published with great success the following year and that a series of five books of poetry translations with Chinese and Russian parallel texts was to come out in China. It was published in 2018, but Sergei was also very proud that at the same time a trilingual edition (Russian, Chinese and Hebrew) in two volumes was printed in Israel. In 2020, even more of his books came out in Russia and China, but his health was declining. I believe he overworked himself, so dedicated he was to his mission of making the best of Chinese poetry known and thus improving the soul and spirit of more people in this world.

As will many friends and readers around the world, I wish to remember Sergei Toroptsev as an outstanding scholar, a great poet himself in the inspired musical words of his translations, and such a wonderful person beaming with subtle humanity. I send my sincere condolences to all his colleagues at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (now Institute of China and Contemporary Asia) and the Russian Academy Sciences, as well as to his family and friends.