


STATE OF THE FIELD ESSAY

Czecho(slovak) Sinology

Olga Lomová* 

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

*Corresponding author. Email: Olga.lomova@ff.cuni.cz

(Received 24 December 2021; revised 29 January 2022; accepted 31 January 2022)

Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, Czechoslovak Sinology gained international recognition and, beginning in the late 1970s, has sometimes been referred to as the “Prague School of Sinology.” This paper will contextualize the achievements of Czechoslovak Sinologists in the broader historical context of the study of China, in the end summarizing the present situation in the Czech Republic. It discusses both Czechoslovak and Czech Sinology as the product of a specific intellectual environment that has nourished academic interest in China and shaped a specific understanding of what “Sinology” (side by side with other “Oriental studies”) means, including its situatedness in specific moments of history.

Keywords: Czech Sinology; Prague School; Jaroslav Průšek

A Remark on Terminology

Before we start looking at Czecho(slovak) studies on China, we must clarify some terminological issues. The first relates to the name of the geographical space we are dealing with. Today’s Czech Republic, established in 1993, is a successor state (together with the Slovak Republic) of the former Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia in turn was established as an independent country only in 1918, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Czechoslovakia gained its independence after decades of efforts by Czech intellectual and political elites to revive the Czech state that had been lost after the Thirty Years’ War. In this article we will start with Sinology at the Czech university in Prague before Czechoslovakia was created, continue with developments in the former Czechoslovakia, and for the recent situation introduce Sinology in the Czech Republic only.

I must also clarify the meanings of the terms *Sinology* and *Oriental studies* as used here. In Czech academia, there has never really been a clear division between Sinology, a humanities discipline preoccupied with studies of (mostly ancient) texts, and Chinese studies, which is preoccupied with issues of contemporary society and often applies methods from the social sciences.¹ At the same time, the centrally planned education

¹This is the case with “Sinologies” in other post-Communist states as well. Currently, there is a trend to develop “Chinese Studies” in political science departments in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, often cut off from the existing local “Sinological” expertise and represented by scholars without working

and research system in Communist Czechoslovakia meant that “Sinology” research could embrace any topic related to China, if the authorities decided so. Thus, after the Soviet-led occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and due to the Sino-Soviet split, “Sinology” education at Charles University came to deal primarily with contemporary ideology and politics in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The last term I use that diverges from standard usage in recent English-language scholarship is *Oriental studies* (*orientalistika* in Czech, derived from the German *Orientalistik*). Following the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* the word *Orient*, along with its derivatives, has become an ideologically loaded term that is generally avoided in most academic writing in English. However, in the Czech context such pejorative overtones are not present. Instead, *Oriental studies* has become a handy general term covering all research on Near Eastern and Asian topics with no negative connotations. As such, it is preserved in the name of the Oriental Institute, it is used in academia to classify various “Oriental” languages and cultures, and students of these subjects call themselves “Orientalists” in Czech.²

Czech National Enlightenment

Sinology was introduced at Prague University by Rudolf Dvořák (1860–1920), who started teaching there in 1884 as a “private docent” of “Eastern languages—Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese, and Aethiopean,” and was soon to become a full professor.³ Dvořák studied “Oriental philology” in Prague and Leipzig and wrote his dissertation on loanwords in the Koran under the celebrated H.L. Fleischer (1801–1888). In Leipzig, Dvořák also studied Chinese (together with Manchu and Japanese) with Georg Conon von der Gabelentz (1840–1893). As Dvořák explicitly says in both his personal and published writings, his decision to broaden his primary interest in Semitic languages was motivated by admiration for Chinese culture not unlike that of Enlightenment-type Sinophilia. For Dvořák, idealized Chinese culture provided a model of a peace-loving, well-governed society that cherished the value of education and harmony, and practiced tolerance and humanism. This image of China converged with the ideals of conservative members of the Czech national movement, of which Dvořák was one.

The late nineteenth century in the Czech lands was a time of rising Czech nationalism, and cultivating the Czech language, literature, and education at all levels was a central focus of this movement.⁴ This “national revival” resulted in, among other things, the introduction of Czech as a language of instruction at Prague University.⁵ In 1882

knowledge of the Chinese language and relevant education about China. To add to the confusion, they are simultaneously classified as social sciences and “area studies.”

²Upon completing this article, the author received an article by her former student in which he presents the history of Czech Sinology from the perspective of teaching Classical Chinese. Interested readers may find abundant details and further nuances there; see Ondřej Škrabal, “The History of Teaching Classical and Literary Chinese in Czechia,” in *Teaching Classical Chinese*, edited by Li Wen and Ralph Kauz (Großheirath: Ostasien, 2021), 33–87.

³On Dvořák, see Olga Lomová et al., *Ex Oriente lux: Rudolf Dvořák (1860–1920)* (Prague: Filozofická fakulta UK, 2020).

⁴On Czech history, see Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2018, 1st edition 2009).

⁵The university was originally established in the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1348. Its main language of instruction was Latin, and it remained so even after the Thirty Years’ War when the Czechs lost their independence and became part of the Habsburg monarchy. During the educational reforms of Joseph II in 1784, German became the official language of instruction.

the efforts of Czech nationalists culminated in the separation of Prague University into two universities, a German and a Czech one. It was at the newly established Czech university that Rudolf Dvořák began teaching Oriental languages. While teaching Arabic, Persian, or Turkish had already been a tradition at the German university in Prague, Chinese was introduced by Dvořák, a small victory of the Czech university over its larger German counterpart.

Dvořák never visited China, and his main interest lay in understanding ancient Chinese civilization through the classical texts. Nevertheless, he would occasionally write for the general public about contemporary China, quoting English, French, and German sources. He also pondered the reasons for China's decline in the modern era, believing that it was the result of a combination of two factors: the Chinese people's excessive conservatism and the lack of industrialization in the country on the one hand, and Western colonial expansion on the other. However, after the shocking experience of World War I, Dvořák returned to his idealized vision of China based on reading Confucius, Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘, and above all Laozi, and passionately promoted Chinese culture as the antidote to the rapacious, militaristic West.⁶

In his time Dvořák was respected, particularly in the German-speaking world, as a leading researcher of "Chinese religion."⁷ However his Sinological scholarship was deemed obsolete already during his lifetime, as major progress was made in this field at the turn of the twentieth century, mainly in France.⁸ Today he is mostly forgotten, even in his country of origin, but he deserves to be remembered even in this short overview of Czech Sinology, because he established a model of scholarship on China that survived for many years to come in Czechoslovakia. His approach was marked by the philological basis of his scholarship, which extended to broader issues of cultural and intellectual history. He systematically used a comparative perspective contrasting Chinese and Western culture, and he believed in the relevance of Chinese heritage for the Czech nation and modern Europe at large. Thus, he understood writing for the general public as an important mission in his scholarly work. As a result, Dvořák's translations and popular writings about Chinese culture contributed to the positive, idealized picture of ancient Chinese culture broadly accepted among Czechs outside academia.

Oriental Institute and the Young Jaroslav Průšek

Rudolf Dvořák died prematurely and did not leave behind a student who could readily teach about China at the university. Prague Czech University (Charles University) expressed no particular interest in Sinology and instead financed the development of classical nineteenth-century-style Oriental studies focused on the ancient languages of the Near East, Egyptology, and Indian (Sanskrit) studies, and soon developed also Arabic and Persian studies.

In 1922 the Oriental Institute was established, personally funded by President T.G. Masaryk. Its primary goal was different from that of Oriental studies at the

⁶Olga Lomová, "Oriental Philology in the Service of Bettering Man: Rudolf Dvořák's Czech Translation of the *Daodejing*," *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 17 (2018), 65–83.

⁷His other internationally known research dealt with the poets Bāki (1526–1600), and Abū Firās (932–968), whose critical editions with commentary he published with Brill in Leiden.

⁸See reviews by Édouard Chavannes, "R. Dvořák: *Chinas Religionen. Erster Theil. Confucius u. seine Lehre*," in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 17 (1895), 303–7; "Dr. Rudolf Dvořák: *Chinas Religionen. Zweiter Theil: Lao-tsi und seine Lehre*," in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 24 (1903), 71–74.

university; it was supposed to provide information supporting the expansion of Czechoslovak industry into the “Orient.” The Oriental Institute offered classes of living Oriental languages to the public and provided expertise about the region to Czechoslovak businessmen. But the institute also had academic ambitions: it founded the *Archiv orientální* journal in 1929, built up a specialized library, and offered stipends for students to travel to the Orient for research and study.⁹

One stipend recipient was Jaroslav Průšek (1906–1980), who later played a crucial role in the establishment of Sinology in Czechoslovakia and the rise of the “Prague School.” Průšek’s initial scholarly pursuits, concentrated on classical studies, were well catered to at Charles University. He studied ancient world history, and his interest in China was initially motivated by his desire to find primary sources about contacts between Europe and Asia during the Byzantine empire.¹⁰ As there was no chance to study Chinese in Prague, and at the same time it was relatively easy to obtain a scholarship to go to Sweden, he eventually studied with Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978). He also spent a few months in Germany, with Gustav Haloun (1898–1951) in Halle and Erich Hähnisch (1880–1966) in Leipzig.¹¹ Upon defending his dissertation in 1932, Průšek traveled to China where he took private classical Chinese lessons to continue his historical research. While in Beijing he encountered young Chinese university professors and students, and his penchant for ancient history gave way to an interest in early vernacular literature. Through personal contacts he also embarked on his first explorations of modern literature. After Beijing, he spent two more years in Tokyo, where he conducted library research on early vernacular stories and made friends with young Chinese left-wing radicals active there. After the Communist revolutions in Czechoslovakia and China, he would utilize these contacts for the benefit of academic exchanges.

Průšek wanted to embark on an academic career (he even contemplated doing so in the US after a brief visit to Berkeley in 1937, where he taught Chinese literature at a summer school),¹² but World War II halted his plans. After the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Czech universities were closed, and young Czechs could no longer gain a higher education. During the war Průšek lectured at the Oriental Institute, which as an institution of practical learning was not included in the ban on Czech higher education. Besides courses on Chinese language, Průšek lectured about Chinese culture. His teaching made a huge impact on his audience, comprising mostly young people who, defying the Nazis, attended these lectures as a substitute for university study.¹³ As a result,

⁹Between the world wars, Czechoslovakia was among the ten most industrialized countries in the world, and it aspired to expand its exports to the Near East and Asia. For a brief history of the Oriental Institute, see: Ondřej Beránek, *Oriental Institute* (Prague: Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2014).

¹⁰For Průšek’s early life and his sojourn in Beijing, see Olga Lomová, “Beiping Initiation: Jaroslav Průšek and Chinese Literary History,” *The China Experience and the Making of Sinology: Western Scholars Sojourning in China*, edited by Guillaume Dutournier and Max Jakob Fölster (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming).

¹¹In Leipzig he also took Japanese classes and later would also initiate Japanese studies at Charles University.

¹²Jaroslav Průšek, “Životopis. Přehled vědecké a literární činnosti. Tvorba sinologická” [Autobiography. Overview of Research and Literary Work. Sinological Works], MÚA, personal papers of Vincenc Lesný, cart. 17, No. 639.

¹³The wartime enthusiasm for Sinology is documented in an interview with Augustin Palát as part of an oral history project initiated by Professor Chih-yu Shih from the Department of Political Science of National Taiwan University. For the transcript in English translation, see www.china-studies.taipei/act02.php.

when Czech universities re-opened after the war in the summer of 1945, there was a group of advanced students dedicated to the study of Sinology, some of whom would soon become university lecturers themselves.

During the war, Průšek continued his research on Chinese vernacular literature in addition to publishing translations of Chinese philosophy and belles-lettres provided with lengthy explanatory essays for the general public. Translating Chinese literature was essential for Průšek's research work, and he would later confess that it enabled him to make "intimate and tangible contact" with the literature he was exploring. Průšek was convinced that only with such contact could "one ... say something of substance of a foreign literary work."¹⁴

His most influential wartime publication, however, was a memoir of his prewar sojourn in China, which bore the suggestive title of *My Sister China*. In the book, Průšek blends his personal experiences, including encounters with May Fourth cultural luminaries, such as Hu Shi 胡適, Bing Xin 冰心, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, and Shen Congwen 沈從文, with an encyclopedic overview of Chinese culture past and present. The book, published in large numbers first in 1940 with a second edition in 1947, sparked a sort of "Sinomania" among the Czechs, inspired the first generation of Czech Sinologists and framed their work with a deep personal attachment to a romantic vision of Chinese culture.¹⁵

The "Prague School": Institutions in Historical Context

A few months after the war, Průšek defended his habilitation thesis at the re-opened Charles University, and as a "private docent" he started to give lectures there in the spring of 1946. He taught classical Chinese (as well as Japanese), including seminars on ancient historiography and some literary texts in the classical language, and East Asian history. Concurrently, Chinese language (modern) and history were introduced at the Palacký University in the city of Olomouc, where Průšek taught alternately with Augustin Palát (1923–2016) until 1953; after that, the program was shut down and Sinology was centralized in Prague.¹⁶ In the same year the Oriental Institute transformed into a research institute; it was given a completely new structure modeled on that of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. The National Gallery's Asian department, with its valuable collection of Chinese art from the first half of the twentieth century, became another important Sinological institution.¹⁷ Náprstek Museum

¹⁴Jaroslav Průšek, "Foreword," in *Chinese History and Literature* (Prague: Academia, 1970), 6.

¹⁵An English translation of the book was published (Jaroslav Průšek, *My Sister China*, Prague: Karolinum, 2002), as well as a Chinese one (Pu Shike 普实克, *Zhongguo, wode jiemei* 中国, 我的姐妹, Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2005). The book was unanimously mentioned by the first postwar generation of Czech scholars interviewed for the National Taiwan University oral history research project. See also Olga Lomová, "Beiping Initiation."

¹⁶For further details about the Sinological program in Prague and Olomouc in the 1950s, see Škrabal, "The History of Teaching Classical and Literary Chinese in Czechia," 47–51.

¹⁷For the formation of the unique collection of modern Chinese art in Prague, which benefitted from the personal collections of Czech artists, particularly of Vojtěch Chytil, who taught at the Beiping Academy of Arts in the 1920s, see Michaela Pejšochová, "The Formation of the Collection of 20th-Century Chinese Painting in the National Gallery in Prague—Friendly Relations with Faraway China in the 1950s and Early 1960s," *Arts asiatiques* 67 (2012), 97–106. See also her *Emissary from the Far East: Vojtěch Chytil and the Collecting of Modern Chinese Painting in Interwar Czechoslovakia* (Prague: National Gallery, 2019), and also contributions to a book she edited together with Clarissa von Spee, *Modern Chinese Paintings and Europe. New Perceptions, Artists Encounters, and the Formation of Collections* (Berlin: Reimer, 2017).

with its collections of Asian and African art and ethnographic objects, some of which were originally from Rudolf Dvořák's personal collection, followed suit.

In the first two decades of building socialism in Czechoslovakia (1948–1968) studies concerned with Asian (and soon also African) countries received the government's full support thanks to the Cold War effort to forge close ties with the developing world. China held a prominent position among them as a close ally from 1949 to approximately 1960, when the Sino-Soviet rift began to affect academia. Some of Průšek's wartime students and later colleagues at Charles University (Augustin Palát, Věna Hrdličková, Zdeněk Hrdlička) joined the diplomatic service in the early 1950s. In addition to facilitating academic exchanges in this position, they also used their diplomatic placements to collect research data about contemporary Chinese culture and society.¹⁸

The politically motivated support for China-related studies coincided with the idealized image of China that went back to the national revival period and was further nourished by Průšek's activities during the war.¹⁹ Besides, a genuine feeling of solidarity with colonized nations was forged among young aspiring scholars, as expressed in the editorial in the first volume of *Nový Orient* (New Orient), a journal established by a group of young Czech Orientalists just a few months after the war ended: "We, who were long subjected to exploitation, sympathize with Oriental nations; we side with the oppressed; we want to understand them and their life and culture."²⁰ In the same editorial the authors speak about the value of ancient Asian cultures and "the lessons of the thousands of years of experience of the Orient to be learnt," which could teach people about the inevitable victory of "humanity, grace, and love" and testify to the importance of developing Oriental studies in Czechoslovakia.²¹

The journal *Nový Orient* was a distinct phenomenon in Czechoslovak academia, Sinology included. It was aimed at the general public while stressing the academic expertise of the authors, much like Dvořák's popular writings from a half century earlier. It popularized knowledge about the Orient, both old and contemporary, by including informative articles, literature in translation, and carefully selected reproductions of visual artworks with biographies of the artists. In 1960 an English version of *Nový Orient* with similar content started to be published (*New Orient Bimonthly*) and distributed internationally. The journal had an international editorial board, on which Joseph Needham sat, among others; its members changed frequently, however.

In the 1950s, when the PRC and Czechoslovakia were politically aligned, Chinese culture was promoted through government-sponsored cultural exchanges that brought to Czechoslovakia exhibitions of traditional Chinese art and traditional theater performances, and further inspired research in that direction. The political friendship also

¹⁸For interviews with Augustin Palát, including rich photographic documentation, see Ivana Bakešová, *Augustin Palát: Vzpomínky na Čínu a sinologii* [Memoirs of China and Sinology] (Prague: Česko-čínská společnost, 2016). A selection of photographs taken by Palát in China in the 1950s was also published; see *Augustin Palát, Cesty Čínou před půl stoletím* [Travels in China Half a Century Ago] (Prague: Česko-čínská společnost, n.d.). On Věna Hrdličková and Zdeněk Hrdlička, see Lucie Olivová, *Věna Hrdličková, Zdeněk Hrdlička: Bibliography 1945/46–2002* (Prague: Oriental Institute, 2002), which includes a short biography.

¹⁹On the postwar fusion of Romantic images of ancient China and enthusiasm for building socialism, see Olga Lomová and Anna Zádrapová, "Beyond Academia and Politics: Understanding China and Doing Sinology in Czechoslovakia after World War II," in *Sinology in Post-communist States*, edited by Chih-yu Shih (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press), 1–26.

²⁰*Nový Orient* 1 (1945), 1.

²¹*Nový Orient* is also discussed in Olga Lomová and Anna Zádrapová, "Beyond Academia and Politics."

enabled the Oriental Institute's library to acquire a large number of books, and it became for some time one of the most important collections of twentieth-century Chinese publications in Europe.²²

The UNESCO East–West Major Project, implemented over the years 1957 to 1966, also fostered favorable conditions for the development of Czechoslovak Sinology. This UNESCO initiative, in which India was most involved, aimed at creating dialogue and mutual respect between “the Orient and the Occident” to understand human cultures in their variety and promote the equality of all cultures; it was highly critical of the prevailing Eurocentrism.²³ This concept, close to what the young Czechoslovak Orientalists were expressing on the pages of *Nový Orient*, coincided with the ideas of the decolonization movement and was supported by the Soviet Bloc in an effort to win over the countries of the nonaligned movement. In Czechoslovak Oriental studies this resulted, among other things, in government-sponsored efforts to research the roots of all Asian civilizations, including research on ancient Chinese history, side by side with Middle Eastern Studies, Indian Studies, as well as Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern Studies.²⁴

To sum up, when Průšek was laying the foundations for his “Prague School,” the ideal conditions existed in Czechoslovakia for academic study about China. Despite the strictly ideologically controlled environment presided over by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and the purges that were decimating other humanities fields, Sinology and Oriental studies in general flourished, and there was enough room for much broader explorations of Chinese culture that did more than just confirm shared political interests and clichés of Marxism-Leninism.²⁵ According to scholars who lived through this period, Sinology even attracted talented students who wanted to do academic work without making concessions to the obligatory Marxist dogma.²⁶

The “Prague School”: Research Interests

The “Prague School” of Sinology is known internationally for pioneering studies of early modern Chinese literature by Jaroslav Průšek and several of his students, the internationally best known being Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (1932–2012) and Marián Gálík (b. 1933). The beginnings of Průšek's work on this topic date to 1956, when he presented his famous “Subjectivism and Individualism” paper at the Junior

²²Xu Weizhu 徐伟珠, “Hanxuejia Pu Shike Zaojiu de Bulage ‘Lu Xun Tushuguan’” 汉学家普实克造就的布拉格‘鲁迅图书馆’ [Lu Xun Library established by Průšek, a Sinologist], *Beijing Di Er Waiguoyu Xueyuan Xuebao* 252 (2016.4), 1–7.

²³For preliminary research on the UNESCO East–West initiative, see Miia Huttunen, “Three Halves of a Whole: Redefining East and West in UNESCO's East–West Major Project 1957–1966,” *Kulttuuripolitiikan tutkimuksen vuosikirja* 5 (2017), 140–54.

²⁴Miroslav Opllt et al., *Asian and African Studies in Czechoslovakia* (Moskva: Nauka, 1967). The chapter about Sinology was written by Augustin Palát.

²⁵There were also vested commercial interests. The Czech auto and machinery industries in particular targeted China (and other friendly Third World countries) for export. For details, see Aleš Skřivan, *Československý vývoz do Číny 1918–1992* [Czechoslovak export to China: 1918–1992] (Prague: Scriptorium, 2009).

²⁶Personal communication, Zlata Černá, June 20, 2021. This issue is, however, more complicated than personal memories may suggest, due to the natural inclination of witnesses to anachronistically adapt their lived experience to fit the new values shaped after radical political change occurred, as is the case with the recollection of the Communist past after the Soviet led invasion in 1968 and the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989.

Sinologue Conference in Paris.²⁷ Published one year later, this article represents well his fundamental contribution to the study of Chinese literary modernity. It is based on close readings of the sources, which Průšek then analyzed with the help of progressive theories and methodologies: aside from Marxism, obligatory in Czechoslovakia but still relatively new in Western Sinology at the time, these included the methodology of the prewar Prague Linguistic Circle, namely that of Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975), and the Russian formalism of Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984). Not unlike the general preoccupation of the humanities of the time with scientific exactness, Průšek aimed at “scientific” objectivity, and searched for patterns of the “literary process.” His ultimate goal was to capture “objective laws” of literary history, while his bold generalizations stemmed from the basic assumption of the East–West dichotomy, which he both asserted and at the same time wanted to overcome.²⁸

Besides articles on general issues of Chinese literary modernity, Průšek also published in-depth research on Lu Xun 鲁迅, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, and Mao Dun 茅盾 (whose novel *Midnight* he translated).²⁹ During the 1950s Průšek also assembled a team of students to systematically explore modern Chinese literature, assigning them work on individual authors and together discussing general issues in the transformation of literature in the twentieth century. He hoped such teamwork would eventually lead to the compilation of a truly “objective” general history of modern Chinese literature.³⁰ Průšek assigned topics to his students and even considered making the project international by involving young researchers from the German Democratic Republic in the project.³¹ The project brought its first results in the form of published dissertations about Lu Xun, Ding Ling 丁玲, Lao She 老舍, and Yu Dafu, and three edited volumes dedicated to modern Chinese literature.³² The authors

²⁷Jaroslav Průšek, “Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature,” *Archiv orientální* 25 (1957), 261–83.

²⁸On Jaroslav Průšek and his broad research interests in the context of contemporary Sinology, see Olga Lomová, “Jaroslav Průšek, A Man of His Time and Place,” *The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies* 2 (2021), 169–96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25365/jeacs.2021.2.169-196>. Leo Ou-fan Lee has collected major Průšek’s research on literary modernity in China in Jaroslav Průšek, *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies in Modern Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

²⁹Jaroslav Průšek, “Lu Hsün’s Huai Chiu: A Precursor of Modern Chinese Literature,” *HJAS* 29 (1969), 169–76; Jaroslav Průšek, *Three Sketches of Chinese Literature* (Prague: Academia, 1969); and Mao Tun: *Šero svit* (Prague: Svoboda, 1950).

³⁰On the “objective history” of modern Chinese literature, which contains both original insights, and ideological bias typical of the period, see Průšek’s long review article “Basic Problems of the History of Modern Chinese Literature: Review of C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*,” *T’oung Pao* 49 (1962), 357–404.

³¹Eva Müller, “In Commemoration of the Work of Professor Jaroslav Průšek in Berlin and Leipzig,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica* 3, *Orientalia Pragensia* 16 (2007), 11–24.

³²The monographs were (in chronological order): Berta Krebsová, *Lu Sün: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Prague: Editions de l’Académie tchécoslovaque des sciences, 1953); Dana Kalvodová, *Ting Ling, život a dílo* [Ding Ling: Life and Work] (Prague, 1953); Zbigniew Słupski, *The Evolution of a Modern Chinese Writer: An Analysis of Lao She’s Fiction with Biographical and Bibliographical Appendices* (Prague: Academia, 1966); Anna Doležalová, *Yü Ta-fu: Specific Traits of His Literary Creation* (Bratislava: Publishing House of The Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1971). One edited volume was published in Berlin: *Studien zur modernen chinesischen Literatur: Studies in Modern Chinese Literature* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964). It was followed by two volumes dedicated to comparative studies of literary modernity in Asia and the Near East published in Prague in English, Oldřich Král et al., eds., *Contributions to the Study of the Rise and Development of Modern Literatures in Asia*, 2 vols. (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1965–1968). On the basis of these two volumes, a Czech monograph on this topic was later published and eventually translated

of these monographs also published Czech or Slovak translations of the authors they researched. Průšek's team alongside scholars with other specializations compiled a Czech *Dictionary of Asian and African Writers* in two volumes (Prague, 1967), later translated and adapted for an English-language edition.³³

Czechoslovak Sinology, however, was not limited to modern literature studies. Průšek shaped it with his broad interest in Chinese tradition and his grandiose vision of a holistic understanding of Chinese civilization in comparative perspective. This involved, in Průšek's conception, cross-disciplinary research about various aspects of Chinese history and culture, past and present, understood as an interconnected whole, its parts mutually illuminating each other. In his own research, besides modern literature, he also worked on the traditional vernacular story (of which he also published excellent translations), and on the nomadic tribes in early Chinese history.

From 1945 through 1970, Průšek used his unique position as the teacher of most Prague Sinologists,³⁴ navigating his students to cover areas of knowledge about China that were as broad as possible. The sheer number of scholars and the variety of research areas developed over a short period in this small country, which lacked a strong tradition of academic study of China, are astonishing. Průšek gathered an impressive group of researchers to explore a variety of topics, some of whom contributed to more than one field: the Chinese language (lexicography, grammar, phonetics) and eventually compile a large Czech–Chinese dictionary (Danuška Heroldová-Štovičková, Zdenka Heřmanová, Jarmila Kalousková, Pavel Kratochvíl, Oldřich Švarný); ancient poetry and aesthetics (Zlata Černá, Oldřich Král, Marta Ryšavá); philosophy (Ema Bayerlová, Berta Krebsová, Jiří Střeleček, much later also Oldřich Král); ancient history (Timoteus Pokora); Song-Yuan and modern history (Josef Fass, Augustin Palát); art history and aesthetics (Zlata Černá, Lubor Hájek, Milena Horáková, Eva Rychterová); the history of Chinese music, storytelling, and theater (Xenie Dvorská, Věna Hrdličková, Dana Kalvodová); and modern fiction and poetry, mostly of the Republican era (Marcela Boušková-Stolzová, Anna Doležalová, Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, Marián Gálik, Danuška Heroldová-Štovičková; Jarmila Häringová, Oldřich Král, Berta Krebsová, Zbigniew Słupski, Danuška Heroldová-Štovičková). This choice of fields reveals the prominent position enjoyed by research on modern literature, side by side with traditional Orientalist concerns. The selection of research topics also reflects the May Fourth-initiated exploration of early vernacular literature, traditional drama, and folklore, as well as the broader aesthetic interests of prewar Europe (pre-modern poetry, painting, Beijing opera). Průšek's former students also began researching Tibet (Josef Kolmaš) and Mongolia (Jiří Šíma), originally as part of research on late imperial Chinese history.

Průšek's students and collaborators embraced his methodology and general approach to scholarship. This entailed as a first step the scrupulous reading of Chinese primary sources, followed by theory-based analysis aimed at grasping the

into Polish: *Setkání a proměny: vznik moderní literatury v Asii* [Encounters and Changes: The Rise of Modern Literature in Asia], edited by Zlata Černá (Prague: Odeon, 1976); in Polish as *Spotkania i przemiany: narodziny nowoczesnych literatur w Azji* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983).

³³*Dictionary of Oriental Literatures*, 3 vols., edited by Jaroslav Průšek (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974).

³⁴There were exceptions. Linguist Jaromír Vochala (1927–2020), who taught Chinese language at Charles University for many years, was educated in the 1950s at Beijing University, and there were other Czech students in China at the same time, who after their return did not work in academic institutions; some, however, would occasionally publish translations from Chinese, and wrote popular books and articles about China, thus contributing to Czechoslovak Sinological production of the time.

general “processes” shaping Chinese civilization. During the early 1950s, Czechoslovak Sinologists were all trained not only in the obligatory Marxism-Leninism (which some of them embraced more enthusiastically than others, as reflected in their publications), but also in the theories of Prague structuralism, which proved productive mainly in studies of language, literature, and the performing arts. Prague Sinologists were well informed about Chinese and Soviet scholarship. However, given the geopolitical position of Czechoslovakia as a member of the Soviet Bloc, it is interesting to note that despite the Cold War divisions, during the 1950s and 1960s the latest Western research was available in Prague, too. Průšek and at least some of his students were also allowed to take part in conferences in the West, corresponded with Western colleagues, and published internationally, while the Prague-based journals *Archiv orientální* and *New Orient* were available in libraries around the globe.

Another point of interest is that Soviet Sinology had relatively little direct impact on research in Czechoslovakia. Průšek personally admired Vasilii Alekseev (1881–1951), whose work was proscribed in the Soviet Union after 1949, when he was purged during the “Anti-cosmopolitan Campaign,”³⁵ and selectively referred to other Soviet scholars as well. There were some official exchanges with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Soviet academic publications were available in Prague libraries and discussed by Czech Sinologists. But despite political allegiance, university students mainly studied from English-language books rather than Russian ones,³⁶ and a sense of competition between Czechoslovak scholars and their Soviet colleagues can be perceived in some of the formers’ publications. Nonetheless, close personal contacts were maintained between Timoteus Pokora (1928–1985) and Yury L. Kroll (1931–2021) in Leningrad, and Věna Hrdličková (1924–2016) and Boris Riftin (1932–2012) in Moscow.

During the formative period of the 1950s, there were much stronger connections with Chinese academia; for example, Czechoslovak students and Ph.D. candidates spent time in China consulting on their research with leading Chinese scholars.³⁷ Direct access to China in the 1950s was particularly valuable for studying theater, music, and the performing arts. It enabled Věna Hrdličková to do field research among Beijing storytellers and Dana Kalvodová (1928–2003) to research *chuanju* 川劇 in Sichuan in 1958³⁸; Xénie Dvorská (1932–1991) studied for her Ph.D. at the music academy in Tianjin (later moved to Beijing) and published her dissertation in Beijing in 1960.³⁹ Eminent Chinese scholars were also invited to Prague as visiting

³⁵On Alekseev, see the recent review article by Christoph Harbsmeier, “Vasilii Mikhailovich Alekseev and Russian Sinology,” *T’oung Pao* 97 (2011), 344–70. Harbsmeier captures Alekseev’s philological and cultural aspirations, which were also dear to Průšek, the much more modest scope of his own work notwithstanding.

³⁶See the transcript of the interview with Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (English translation) from Cih-yu Shih’s project mapping Sinologies globally: www.china-studies.taipei/act02.php.

³⁷Milena Doleželová published the recollections of European and American scholars, including the Czech Dana Kalvodová, of their teacher Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴 (1914–1995): *Wu Xiaoling Remembered* (Prague: DharmaGaia, 1998).

³⁸For the results of her field research, see “The Origin and Character of the Szechwan Theatre,” *Archiv orientální* 34 (1966), 505–23, and “Theatre in Szechwan,” *Interscaena: Acta Scaenographica* (Prague: Scénografický ústav, 1972), 1–92.

³⁹Dana Kalvodová published three volumes of literary translations. Besides a selection of early stories by Ding Ling (*Deník slečny Suo-fej a jiné prózy* [Miss Sophia’s Diary and other stories], Prague: SNKLHU, 1955), she also published an annotated selection of Guan Hanqing’s 關漢卿 dramas (Kuan Chan-čching, *Letní snění a jiné hry* [Snow in Summer and Other Plays], Prague: SNKLHU, 1960), and

professors. In 1957 Zheng Zhenduo gave a series of lectures for students at the Oriental Institute, and from 1955 to 1957 Ji Zhenhuai 季鎮淮 (1913–1997), a student of Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 and Wen Yiduo 聞一多, was a lecturer in Prague.⁴⁰

After Prague Spring

During the thaw of the late 1960s international contacts intensified, and Czechoslovak Sinologists frequently visited academic institutions across Europe and the US. In 1967 Průšek was a visiting professor at Harvard University, where one of his students was Leo Ou-fan Lee, who would later be instrumental in bringing Průšek's scholarship on modern Chinese literature to broader attention internationally. It was a bitter joke of history that the tanks suppressing Prague Spring in August 1968 arrived just four days before the annual Junior Sinologue Conference was set to open in Prague.⁴¹

After the Soviet-led invasion, Průšek was forced to retire, his team was dispersed, and those who remained at the Oriental Institute could do little more than prepare Chinese press digests for the needs of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its propaganda organs. China had become ideological enemy number 1, not only due to the Sino-Soviet split of 1959, but also because it vehemently criticized the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as an act of "Soviet social-imperialism."⁴² In this tense atmosphere, Průšek's final book, in which he published his long-running research about interactions between nomads and Han sedentary culture in ancient times,⁴³ was banned in Czechoslovakia, along with his other writings, and he was accused of anti-Soviet sentiments. His last Czech publication—a comparative study of realism in the *huaben* 話本 stories and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, included in an edited volume dedicated to Chinese literature and culture—could be published only under the name of one of his students. The book itself hid its politically sensitive preoccupation with China by using a geographically broader title, *Cultural Traditions of the Far East*.⁴⁴ The majority of foreign Sinological books in Czech libraries, apart from Soviet ones, were accessible only with special permission.

The consequences were devastating for Průšek and his closest collaborators, with the exception of those who emigrated (Milena Doleželová-Velingerová left for the US, later

an annotated full translation of Kong Shangren's 孔尚任 *Peach Blossom Fan* with an introductory essay about the author and the *chuanqi* 傳奇 genre (Kchung Šang-žen, *Vějíř s broskvovými květy*, Prague: Odeon, 1968). The dissertation of Xénie Dvorská was published in Chinese as Wu Kangni 伍康妮, *Chunqiu Zhanguo Shidai Ru, Mo, Dao Sanjia zai Yinyue Sixiang shang Douzheng* 春秋战国时代儒, 墨, 道三家 in 音乐思想上的斗争 [Ideological struggle between Confucianism, Mohism and Daoism during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods] (Beijing: Yinyue Chubanshe, 1960).

⁴⁰Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 20, 2021. Dr. Černá vividly remembered reading the *Shijing* 詩經 with Ji Zhenhuai, including how he was completely immersed in the traditional *yin* 吟 poetry recitation.

⁴¹The conference was cancelled and moved to Senigallia, Italy, the next year. Some of the papers prepared for the Prague conference, including Průšek's presentation, were subsequently published in Prague: *The May Fourth Movement in China: Major Papers prepared for the XX. International Congress of Chinese Studies* (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1968).

⁴²For the official Chinese response to the invasion translated into English, see "Chinese Reactions to the Invasion of Czechoslovakia," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 2 (1969), 115–24.

⁴³*Chinese Statelets and the Northern Barbarians in the Period 1400–300 B.C.* (Prague: Academia and Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1971).

⁴⁴Zlata Černá, "Jedinec jako osobnost v jazyce prózy: charakterizační umění v čínské a evropské středověké povídce" [An individual as a personality in the language of fiction: the art of character depiction in Chinese and European medieval stories], in *Kulturní tradice Dálného východu* (Prague: Odeon, 1980), 195–10.

to settle in Toronto, Paul Kratochvíl for Cambridge, Zbigniew Ślupski for Warsaw).⁴⁵ Průšek's two Slovak students found themselves in a slightly better situation, both researching modern literature (Anna Doležalová, Marián Gálik),⁴⁶ as they found refuge away from the capital in Bratislava, where the Department of Oriental Studies—the first Slovak academic institution of this kind ever—had recently been established at the Academy of Sciences.⁴⁷

In Prague, Průšek and his collaborators tried to continue their research, even though they were prevented from working in academic institutions. They would regularly gather once a month and report to each other on the research they were privately undertaking.⁴⁸ Mundane concerns, however, eventually led to the decline of their research work, and only very few of them persisted. Timoteus Pokora, who made a living as a translator and occasional interpreter from Western languages, would regularly publish his findings. While his English-language studies were tolerated by the authorities, when publishing in the Czech language he sometimes had to borrow a friend's name to conceal his identity.⁴⁹ Another of Průšek's students who remained active was Dana Kalvodová, who found refuge at the Department of Theatre Studies of the Charles University's Faculty of Arts and conducted research on the broad subject of theater anthropology with focus on Asia to avoid the censorship that all China-related matters were subject to. At the margins, research in linguistics continued in Prague, and the

⁴⁵Milena Doležalová-Velingerová mainly developed Průšek's idea that the beginnings of Chinese literary modernity predated the pre-May-Fourth literary revolution in an edited volume dedicated to the early-twentieth-century novel (*The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). Much later she would return to debating the May Fourth paradigm in another edited volume (*The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Project*, edited by Milena Doležalová-Velingerová, Oldřich Král, and Graham M. Sanders (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001). Pavel (Paul) Kratochvíl published a much-cited book, *The Chinese Language Today: Features of an Emerging Standard* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1968). Zbigniew Ślupski, who dedicated his first monograph to Lao She, would turn to pre-modern literature after he left Czechoslovakia ("Three Levels of Composition of the Rulin Waishi," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49 (1989), 5–53). In Warsaw, he also lectured and published about Confucianism and other topics of ancient China.

⁴⁶After Anna Doležalová published her dissertation about Yu Dafu, she devoted herself mostly to PRC literature, including Slovak translations. Marián Gálik mainly researched the literary theory of Republican China and comparative studies (which he established himself with his first monograph based on his dissertation supervised by Průšek about modern Chinese literary theory: *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism (1917–1930)* (London: Curzon Press, 1980). See also his *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation (1898–1979)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).

⁴⁷Today it is known as the Institute of Oriental Studies. It publishes the English-language *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. On its history, see <http://orient.sav.sk/en/history/>.

⁴⁸This took place on the first Thursday each month in the apartment of Zlata Černá (Zlata Černá, personal communication, June 20, 2021).

⁴⁹He still succeeded in publishing two books prepared in the 1960s: Wang Čchung, *Kritická pojednání: výbor z díla čínského filosofa: 1. stol. n. l.* [Lunheng by Wang Chong, selections from a Chinese philosopher, 1st century A.D.], translation, introduction, and commentaries Timoteus Pokora (Prague: Academia, 1971); and *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 B.C.–28 A.D.)* (University of Michigan Press, 1975). After that he published several research articles in European (mostly German) journals, and over 300 reviews and short articles in Czechoslovak journals. Writing reviews was important for Pokora, as it was the only way to obtain Western scholarship, which was otherwise inaccessible in Prague after 1968. For a full bibliography with a short biography, see Josef Fass, Jiří Šíma, and Vladimír Liščák, *Timoteus Pokora: Bibliografie 1952–1987* [Timoteus Pokora: Bibliography 1952–1987] (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1994).

only academic work to survive the purges at the Oriental Institute was the compilation of the massive nine-volume Czech–Chinese dictionary (1974–1984). Průšek's former student Zdenka Heřmanová (b. 1930) was the chief editor, replacing Oldřich Švarný (1920–2011), who had been dismissed from the Institute.⁵⁰

Thanks to remarkable international solidarity, some Czechoslovak Sinologists were given the chance to join publication projects abroad. The authorities did not bar them from such activities, but the books they contributed to were not allowed to circulate in Czechoslovakia.⁵¹

Sinology at Charles University was barely surviving. New students were recruited in very small numbers (fewer than ten) and only once every five years. Some teachers were fired, and the curriculum was changed. Besides basic training in modern Chinese focused on newspaper reading, classes about Chinese history and culture were limited to a minimum, while much space was devoted to Marxism-Leninism and the history of Communism and national liberation movements in former colonies—all interpreted through the obligatory prism of the current Soviet view.⁵² Research was limited to issues of politics and ideology in contemporary China, and it was supervised by organs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to ensure orthodoxy of interpretation.⁵³

While all Průšek's publications were proscribed and not accessible in the university library, students would search for them in antiquarian bookshops. Studying Chinese culture had become a sort of underground adventure, and some would secretly visit banned scholars at their homes to take private classes with them. Průšek's former student Zlata Černá (b. 1932), who worked as a curator at the Náprstek Museum, taught classical Chinese evening classes at the Language School in Prague, as she felt her mission was to carry on in some way her teacher's legacy. Translations of several works of classical literature were published and well received by the readers during the 1970s and 1980s, such as poetry of Li Bai 李白, Wang Wei 王維, and Bai Juyi 白居易; Tang dynasty *chuanqi* novelettes; the eighteenth-century novel *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢; and Judge Bao detective stories. As virtually any publication about China was potentially subversive in the eyes of the authorities, such works could be published only after complex negotiations between the publishers and official supervising bodies; in some cases the identity of the translator had to be covered up and the name of a student or friend used to avoid censorship.

⁵⁰Work on the dictionary started in 1959, and the outline was prepared in collaboration with general linguist Ladislav Zgusta (1924–2007), who would later become famous internationally for his theoretical work in the field of lexicography. As the dictionary was published after he emigrated to the US, his name is not mentioned. For his work on the dictionary, see Augustin Palát in Miroslav Opl, *Asian and African Studies in Czechoslovakia*, 78.

⁵¹*China Handbuch*, edited by Wolfgang Franke and Brunhild Staiger (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1974); *Dictionary of Oriental Literatures*; and *Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900–1949* 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981–1990).

⁵²This program was branded as “Oriental studies.”

⁵³Jaromír (1927–2020), teaching language together with his wife, Wang Ruzhen (1934–1998), compiled textbooks and published a monograph on Chinese script (Jaromír Vochala, *Chinese Writing System: Minimal Graphic Units*, Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1986). Their textbook of classical Chinese was translated into German and published in East Germany: Jaromír Vochala, Žu-čen Vochalová, and Klaus Kaden, *Einführung in die Grammatik des klassischen Chinesisch* (Leipzig: Enzyklopädie, 1990). Vochala also published Czech translations of Chinese poetry (selections from the *Shijing* 詩經, Han *yüefu*, and the *Chuci* 楚辭), and much later published a complete translation of the *Lunyu* 論語.

Political interference in Czechoslovak Sinology had devastating effects. Some of the most serious damage was inflicted by severing ties with the international community and shutting off access to new research. This repression in Czechoslovakia coincided with a boom in research about China in the West, and Průšek's works—banned in Czechoslovakia—were appreciated internationally, the designation of the Prague School was coined, and earlier studies on modern Chinese literature by Czech and Slovak scholars stimulated new research on modern Chinese literature.⁵⁴

After the Velvet Revolution

When the constraints on research and teaching about China were lifted after the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia in late 1989, there was no simple way for Czech scholars to continue what had been interrupted for twenty years. China-related studies had evolved considerably during Czechoslovakia's isolation. Unlike in the 1950s, when only a few countries, Czechoslovakia among them, had direct access to Chinese scholars and to China, by 1989 it had become the norm for Western Sinology to send students to China and do field research there (while Czechoslovak students and researchers had only limited access to China now). With Průšek's passing in 1980, Czech Sinology had lost a unifying figure, one who provided a vision and initiated collective efforts. While Průšek's former students were nearing retirement age, the new generation only started to work on their dissertations after 1989.⁵⁵ But China itself had changed, too; after forty years of building socialism, the horrors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and the Tiananmen massacre, Chinese culture had lost much of its charm for Czech scholars.

As a result, the 1990s were a period in which Czech Sinologists sought to rebuild their discipline from the ground up, including forging new international connections (and fighting for limited resources). Very few scholars who had studied under Průšek were ready to come back to teach and do research. One example, though, was Oldřich Král (1930–2018), who focused on Chinese philosophy and literary thought in comparative perspective. He did not, however, develop any new research projects, nor did he take on PhD students. Instead, he devoted himself to preparing new editions of his earlier translations (*Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史) and to publishing new translations (*Sunzi Bingfa* 孫子兵法, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and *Yijing* 易經, among others), as well as compiling a textbook of Chinese philosophy.⁵⁶ Král prepared his translations primarily for the lay reader, and unlike Průšek, published only very few research articles related to the works he translated.

Průšek's most productive Czech students in the 1990s were Dana Kalvodová, and Věna Hrdličková.⁵⁷ Both still based their new research primarily on material they

⁵⁴See, for example, the dedication in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*: "To Jaroslav Průšek whose work made this book possible." *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

⁵⁵There were only very few doctoral written between 1968 and 1989, none of them published, and their authors do not work in academia.

⁵⁶*Čínská filosofie: pohled z dějin* [Chinese philosophy: The view from history] (Lásence: Maxima, 2005).

⁵⁷In Slovakia, Marián Gálik has been very active, mainly publishing internationally, in English and in Chinese. Of Průšek's students, he is the most prolific author. From his numerous edited volumes and articles, of special note is his research on the Bible in modern Chinese literature: *Influence, Translation and Parallels: Selected Studies on the Bible in China* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 2004). Many of his works, including research on the history of Czechoslovak Sinology, have been published in Chinese translations. For bibliography of his work up to 2009 see http://orient.sav.sk/wp-content/uploads/Bibliography_Dr.Galik_.pdf. Another of Průšek's Slovak students, Anna Doležalová, who

had collected in China during the 1950s (Hrdličková also in 1960s Japan).⁵⁸ Oldřich Švarný finalized and published his monumental *Učební slovník jazyka čínského* [Learners' Dictionary of Colloquial Chinese] in four volumes (Olomouc, 1998–2000),⁵⁹ in which he used material recorded from native speakers during the previous decades and perfected his system of word stress annotation, providing firsthand material and guidance to young Czech scholars who omit publish on applied linguistics today.⁶⁰

In 1996 Milena Doleželová returned to Prague after retiring from the University of Toronto to teach a doctoral seminar on modern literature, bringing back Průšek's ideas as she had developed them during her years in exile. She taught in Prague until 2000 supported from a generous grant from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation (CCKF). The CCKF has been a benefactor of Sinology in Prague in other ways, too: in 1997 it established the International Sinological Centre at Charles University, which has provided invaluable support for Prague and East European Sinology in many ways.

During the transformation of the teaching program at Charles University in the early 1990s, there was a consensus among the teachers that they should return to their roots, which meant strengthening research and teaching about pre-modern China. Olga Lomová, the author of this article, was in charge of this change. This turn to tradition resulted in several dissertations on ancient and medieval history, literature, philosophy, religion, and the linguistics of the classical language (Jakub Maršálek, Zornica Kirková, Lukáš Zádrapa, Jakub Hrubý, Dušan Vávra, Jakub Otčenášek). Other dissertations from the 1990s and early 2000s dealt with the iconography of folk art (Martin Hála), eighteenth-century literati and popular culture in Yangzhou (Lucie Olivová), and Ming dynasty art theory (Michaela Pejčochová). After Dušan Andrš and Helena Heroldová wrote their dissertations about early twentieth-century Chinese literature under Milena Doleželová in the late 1990s, modern literature, including Tibetan and Taiwanese literature, became a favorite subject among Ph.D. students in Prague in the 2000s (Táňa Dluhošová, Kamila Hladíková, Pavlína Krámská, František Reismüller). Ondřej Klimeš wrote his dissertation on modern history of Uyghur

researched modern literature, died in 1992. In the meantime, the next generation of Sinologists started to shape the field in Slovakia. For reasons of simplicity, I leave Slovak Sinology which is now independent of Prague from my subsequent overview.

⁵⁸Dana Kalvodová could have her previous research about Ming drama published only at this point in time ("Kchung Šang-Zenův vějíř s broskvovými květy: kapitoly ke studiu mingského dramatu" [Kong Shangren's Peach Blossom Fan: A Contribution to Research about Ming Drama], Prague: Karolinum, 1993). She also published several new research articles, mostly in Czech (for a complete bibliography, see Anna Cvrčková and Lenka Chaloupková, "Bibliografie Dany Kalvodové" [Dana Kalvodová Bibliography], *Divadelní revue* 32.1, (2021), 111–24). For an English-language publication after 1989, see her *The Bamboo-leaf Boat: Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philosophica et Historica 5, Theatralia X* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1994), together with James Crump and Ursula Dauth. Věna Hrdličková, besides publishing numerous popular books in Czech about Chinese culture, particularly about gardens, did important research about Chinese and Japanese storytelling that was published internationally. For details, see Vibeke Bordahl, "In Memory of Věna Hrdličková, 1925–2016," *CHINOPERL* 35 (2016), 83–88.

⁵⁹*Učební slovník jazyka čínského* [Learner's dictionary of Chinese language] 1–4 (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 1998–2000). Collaboration with Chinese native speakers, particularly Tang Yunling 唐雲凌 (1935–2019) was essential for the dictionary.

⁶⁰See mainly recent articles by Hana Třísková, e.g., "Is the Glass Half-full, or Half-empty? The Alternative Concept of Stress in Mandarin Chinese," *Studies in Prosodic Grammar* 4 (2019.2), 64–105; Hana Třísková, "De-stress in Mandarin: Clitics, Cliticoids and Phonetic chunks," in *Key Issues in Chinese as a Second Language Research* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 29–56.

nationalism.⁶¹ Recently, national minorities have been attracting the interest of growing numbers of students, and at Charles University both Tibetan (as a full program of Tibetan studies) and Uyghur (language and culture) are taught.

The 1990s were also a period of reform and expansion in university programs. The former five-year master's program was reworked and, following the new pan-European system, split into two levels of study: a three-year bachelor's program and a two-year master's program. Enrollment increased, and new subjects were introduced. At the same time, unfortunately, the number of students in the masters program decreased. Over time, the curriculum focused on more pragmatic topics; however, classical scholarship still enjoyed great prestige, and classical Chinese reading courses have remained compulsory until now.

The guiding idea in the development of Sinology at Charles University was to continue pursuing Průšek's vision of solid philological analysis as the basis and to bring together "tradition and modernity," whatever that might mean today. Current research at Charles University embraces linguistics with a special focus on classical Chinese, including collaboration on the international *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae* project, currently affiliated with the University of Heidelberg (Lukáš Zádřapa); ancient history and archaeology (Jakub Maršálek); ancient and medieval literature, particularly poetry, aesthetics, and historiography (Olga Lomová and Zornica Kirková as external collaborator); modern Chinese literature, particularly that of Republican China (Dušan Andráš); modern history and the history of science, particularly mathematics (Jiří Hudeček⁶²); and modern poetry (Olga Lomová, Šárka Masárová). In collaboration with the Oriental Institute, a new course on Taiwanese literature and culture has been offered since 2019 (Táňa Dluhošová).

The Oriental Institute remains the main center of Sinological research in the Czech Republic. Researchers there, some of whom also teach classes at Charles University, cover topics related to ancient and medieval intellectual, cultural, political, and institutional history (Oliver Weingarten, Jakub Hrubý) and the history of the Silk Road and contacts between the Czech lands and China in the medieval period (Vladimír Liščák), but in general, the focus has shifted to modern and contemporary topics. Research on Taiwanese literature concentrates on the early postwar period and combines text-based analysis with the approaches of the sociology of literature and digital humanities (Táňa Dluhošová, director of the Oriental Institute since 2021).⁶³ A research group focused on ethnic minorities in contemporary China has been established. Its primary focus is on

⁶¹The dissertations were often written in English, were subsequently published, and reached an international audience: Lukáš Zádřapa, *Word-class Flexibility in Classical Chinese: Verbal and Adverbial Uses of Nouns* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Kamila Hladíková, *The Exotic Other and Negotiation of Tibetan Self: Representation of Tibet in Chinese and Tibetan Fiction of the 1980s* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2013); Ondřej Klimeš, *Struggle by the Pen: The Uyghur Discourse of Nation and National Interest, c. 1900–1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Zornica Kirková, *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁶²Jiří Hudeček earned his Ph.D. at the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge and subsequently published his dissertation as *Reviving Ancient Chinese Mathematics: Mathematics, History and Politics in the Work of Wu Wen-Tsun* (London: Routledge, 2014). He also supervised Jan Vrhovský's dissertation about mathematical logic in Republican China, which was recently submitted. Vrhovský is currently working as a researcher at the University of Ljubljana and publishes extensively on modern Chinese philosophy.

⁶³Táňa Dluhošová, *Bitevné polia povojnovej literatúry na Taiwane (1945–1949): časopisy, diskusie a literárne diela* [Fields of battle in postwar Taiwanese literature (1945–1949): journals, debates, literary works] (Prague: Oriental Institute, 2021). Substantial parts of this book were previously published in

the Uyghurs (Ondřej Klimeš, Giulia Cabras, Sam Tynen). China's development policy in Tibetan areas and Sino-Tibetan relations are also being examined (Jarmila Ptáčková) by this group, as is history and ethnicity in the context of Southwest China and adjacent regions with a special focus on Nuosu-Yi society (Jan Karlach).⁶⁴ This research, particularly that conducted by Ondřej Klimeš, also examines PRC politics, soft power, and ideology. In the past few years, the Oriental Institute has become much more diversified in terms of its scholars' education backgrounds than it was in Průšek's time, with a number of researchers trained at various institutions internationally. Sinological research is also carried on, albeit on a much smaller scale, at both the National Gallery (Michaela Pejčochová) and the Náprstek Museum (Helena Heroldová).⁶⁵

After 1989 two new centers of Sinology were established outside of Prague: at Palacký University in Olomouc in 1993 and at Masaryk University in Brno in 2009. Both departments provide an education to many more undergraduate students than Prague. So far, though, neither of these schools has developed research capacities which would have broader impact in Czech Sinology.⁶⁶ Several teachers in Olomouc work on applied linguistics and "Chinese grammatology." The department has been collaborating with a Confucius Institute since 2007, which facilitated, among other things, the publication of a Czech translation of Xi Jinping's *Governance of China* by Olomouc University Press.⁶⁷ Sinology in Brno offers a more comprehensive vision of Chinese culture than Olomouc. Lucie Olivová (Ph.D. from Prague) has published on Yangzhou storytelling and now explores Chinese art history from the perspective of cultural exchange between China and Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Early philosophy (Zhuangzi, Wang Bi 王弼) remains the focus of Dušan Vávra's (Ph.D. Brno and Prague) research, while Christianity in China and Taiwan is studied by Magdalena Rychetská (Ph.D. Brno, Study of Religion).

English and in Chinese as journal articles. See also the "Taiwan Biographical Ontology (TBIO)," <http://tbio.orient.cas.cz/>.

⁶⁴Jarmila Ptáčková, who received her Ph.D. from Humboldt University (Berlin), recently published *Exile from the Grasslands: Tibetan Herders and Chinese Development Projects* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

⁶⁵Michaela Pejčochová, besides publishing a comprehensive catalogue of the modern painting collection at the National Gallery in Prague (*Masters of 20th-Century Chinese Ink Painting from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague: National Gallery in Prague—Collection of Oriental Art, Waldstein Riding School Gallery, April 30—November 2, 2008*, Prague: National Gallery, 2008), does substantial research on the history of Chinese art collecting in the former Czechoslovakia (see n. 17, above). Helena Heroldová publishes mostly on the Náprstek Museum's collections, recently in English *Between Cultures: Manchu and Han Dress during the Late Qing* (Prague: Národní muzeum, 2017).

⁶⁶At Palacký University in Olomouc, Sinology is taught in the Department of Asian Studies (<https://kas.upol.cz/en/>), and in Brno, in the Department of Chinese Studies (<https://cinskastudia.phil.muni.cz/en/about-us/people>).

⁶⁷See numerous local publications by David Uher (Ph.D. Nanjing University) and Tereza Slaměňková (Ph.D. Olomouc). At Palacký University in Olomouc, there is currently a large cross-disciplinary project under way with support from the European Regional Development Fund (SINOFON; <https://sinofon.cz/>). It aims "to introduce a new research approach toward rising China, grounded in the dialogue between key regions on its borders." It brings together a diverse group of Czech and international scholars, mostly not working on China, and unlike the interdisciplinary approach promoted by Průšek in the past, this team, due to its size and divergent research interests, is only loosely interconnected; the project is also not directly related to teaching. As a result, it is hard to predict what impact it will have on Czech Sinology in the future, if any.

Conclusion

Today, Czech Sinology finds itself in a substantially different environment, both domestically and internationally, from that of the postwar “golden age” of the Prague School. In terms of the number of centers and students, Sinology in the Czech Republic has grown considerably with three university centers offering undergraduate and graduate programs, besides research traditionally undertaken at the Oriental Institute, the National Gallery, and the Náprstek Museum.

Průšek's pioneering research still inspires scholars exploring the modern transformation of Chinese literature and culture, even though modern literary studies has lost its dominant position in Czech Sinology. The most productive of Průšek's ideas is his concept of the “Chinese lyrical tradition” (*shuqing chuantong* 抒情傳統), which converged with similar concepts formulated by scholars of Chinese origin beginning in the 1970s. Currently this idea is elaborated by scholars also outside the Czech Republic, most prominently by Harvard-based scholar David Der-wei Wang and by Leonard Chan (Chen Guoqiu 陳國球), formerly based in Hong Kong and now at Tsinghua University (Hsinchu).⁶⁸

There are marked differences in the training and academic experience of Czech scholars in the first two decades after World War II and today. Initially, Prague was a largely self-sufficient academic center practicing Sinology as an interdisciplinary area of study designed and supervised by one scholar of unique vision: Jaroslav Průšek. During their Ph.D. studies in the 1950s, Průšek's students went to China to consult on their research with renowned Chinese scholars of the time, and some of his other students also studied in the West.⁶⁹ But they all respected Jaroslav Průšek as the ultimate master and in this sense belonged to a distinct school of scholarship.

Today the situation is different. Since Průšek's death, there has been no scholar of similarly broad vision and authority. At the same time, with the end of the Cold War, Czech Sinology absorbed new ideas and approaches from other centers of scholarship, and young scholars trained at other Sinology institutes in Europe and elsewhere are active in Czech academia now, particularly at the Oriental Institute. As a result, Czech Sinological research has developed in new directions. The most fruitful research, in terms of number of publications, is concentrated on early and medieval China (linguistics, literature) and on minorities, particularly the Uyghurs and the Tibetans. Contemporary politics and ideology are enjoying growing popularity, both among researchers and students.

But does this mean that the legacy of the Prague School has been obliterated in the Czech Republic and that Czech Sinology has lost its distinct features? I do not think so, because the basic approaches cultivated in Czechoslovak academia since the 1950s (partly following a pattern established much earlier) still dominate. Czech Sinological research is still rooted in philological work, whether it focuses on ancient poetry or contemporary ideology and politics. Besides, annotated translations provided with

⁶⁸Most recently David Der-wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Chen Guoqiu 陳國球, *Shuqing chuantong lun yu Zhongguo wenxue shi* 抒情傳統論與中國文學史 (Discourses on the Chinese Lyrical Tradition and Literary Historiography) (Taipei: Shibao Wenhua, 2021).

⁶⁹Berta Krebsová studied in Paris with Paul Démieville and René Grousset; Věna Hrdličková spent two years at Radcliffe College in Cambridge (Massachusetts), and her husband, Zdeněk Hrdlička, at Harvard University. See also interview with Věna Hrdličková from Chih-yu Shih's project: www.china-studies.taipei/act02.php.

analytical introductions and detailed commentaries represent an important part of Czech Sinological scholarship and make up a significant portion of some scholars' research. Since 2011, complete annotated Czech translations of the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, the *Xunzi* 荀子, and a new annotated translation of the *Daodejing* 道德經 that includes a grammatical analysis of its language, have been prepared by scholars who studied after 1989. Also, an extensive selection from the *Shiji* 史記 with introductory chapters on early Chinese historiography has been made available in recent Czech translation.⁷⁰

Another feature connecting contemporary Czech Sinology with Průšek's legacy is the comparative and transdisciplinary approach in dialogue with other disciplines practiced in Czech academia, such as philosophy, aesthetics, religion, and literary theory; recently there is also growing interest in topics about contemporary China. This means that a relatively large portion of Sinological research in the Czech Republic is published in the Czech language and addresses also local scholars outside the field of Sinology.

Another distinctive feature of Czech Sinology is the strong link between academia and the lay public. While in the past, the public's attention was largely motivated by admiration for ancient Chinese culture, today with China's growing global presence Czech society instead expects from Sinologists expertise about contemporary China and current Chinese politics. This demand sparked the founding of Project Sinopsis (<https://sinopsis.cz/>), an independent think tank set up by teachers and students from the Department of Sinology of Charles University in 2016, which also collaborates with the Oriental Institute and monitors PRC involvement in Czech politics, explains the PRC's political system and ideology, and provides basic historical context to current events discussed in the Chinese and Czech media. As suggested in the introductory remark on terminology, in the eyes of the general public, this is also regarded as "Sinological" work.

⁷⁰*Chan-fej-c'* [Hanfeizi], translated by Lukáš Zádřapa (Prague: Academia, 2011–2013); *Sün-c': tradičně Sün Kchuang* [Xunzi, known as Xun Kuang], translated by Lukáš Zádřapa (Prague: Academia, 2019); *Kniha vrchních písařů: výbor z díla čínského historika* [Book of Grand Scribes: Selection from Ancient Chinese History], translated by Olga Lomová and Timoteus Pokora (Prague: Karolinum, 2012); *Kniha Laozi: překlad s filologickým komentářem* [Laozi: Translation with philological commentary], translated by David Sehnal (Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2013).