Augustin Palát: I loved to read Mathesius, it was one of things that made me attend Průšek’s Chinese lessons at the Oriental Institute. (...) There was only one possibility for those who decided to feed themselves as the orientalists: a work at the faculty. Until the First World War the possibility was zero. Some people of the generation of Hrozný, Rypka and Lesný, born in the eighties of 19th century, studied in Vienna and after 1918 they came here. They became the professors at the faculty practically immediately. Thus the possibilities ended for anyone else. There was no way to employ an assistant or even the associate professor. The members of the generation born around 1900 had to earn money by other activities. They usually choose classical philology, German studies combined with Czech studies and worked as the high school teachers. The only one having the courage to find his own way was Průšek. He managed to study Chinese outside our republic – in Sweden and in Germany. He was cheeky enough to venture into Far East, China and Japan. You may not know how he got to Japan. From 1931 Japan was winning through to China, Manchuria and so on. Průšek criticised Japan sharply for it and the responsible Japan authorities offered him a scholarship in order to make him correct his opinions. He accepted it and spent two years and half in Japan. He came back in 1937, after some time he was invited to give the lectures in Berkeley. After he came back here he found himself without a job. There was no way to employ him in the OI, he set himself up by Bafa, he worked at the university library and so forth. He prepared some articles at that time, translated the Confucius and he also started the courses in the OI. OI was a club at that time, the businessmen and the economists connected with Orient consorted there. It was not the university: by the time the universities were closed, OI remained open. My generation members passed their graduation exams at the beginning of the Second World War. Before universities were open again, I had to wait five or six years! The courses in the OI replaced the proper seminars and university atmosphere. The university professors lectured there, as well as people not established in the academic hierarchy yet. Průšek attained the habilitation in 1945, and it lasted two more years before he was appointed the associate professor – and sinology was established at the same time. Průšek lectured privately before that, but those lectures did not enjoy the official acknowledgment. People who were connected with the OI during the Second World War had two possibilities: they usually went to Pertold to religious studies, or they started to study English, Russian – they finished their study and did not return to sinology. Many of my classmates from 1943-1944 were absorbed by the other discipline. Some of them went to the faculty of law. I did attend not even one lecture at the faculty of law. I only took the exams. I could arbitrarily enter various lectures at the arts faculty, one could do it then. As soon as Průšek was appointed I wanted to quit immediately and go over to the arts faculty definitively, but Průšek told me to finish it... I had few weeks or months left. I never used any of the law knowledge, with the exception of the legal notes.
There was Mrs. Krebsová in my class, she was a second wife of Průšek and she started to study Chinese. There were Skalička, Borák – later he did the law and not sinology. Smrž studied English and Literature, after graduation he managed some culture institution abroad. He was in Hungary and so. In 1944 Hrdlička and Stunová started the course. The courses were forbidden during the times of “Totaleinsatz”, moreover the building of the OI in Lobkowicz Palace was occupied by Nazis – we moved the library somewhere to Vinohrady. Průšek continued giving lectures and discussions in his flat. In 1944 we went to his flat.

O. L.: He lived in Nerudova street at that time?

Yes, he lived there to 1949 or longer. Longer, I remember I was surprised in 1956, when I came on my holiday from China, because he lived in Gogolova street already. He must have lived in Nerudova until the half of the fifties.

O. L.: Dr. Šejnohová reminisces about her exams in Nerudova.

Sure, sure. Should we talk so haphazardly, I remember Průšek as the assistant professor had no place of his own after the war: he had neither office of his own nor chance to arrange the library. When sinology became the university discipline in 1947, the workplace was not at the faculty, but at the OI on the second floor. We all got one room there. Later we got two rooms at the faculty on the fourth floor. One window lead on to Hradčany, the other lead on to Jewish cemetery. Getting the equipment was very funny. It was chaotic. I remember I got the writing desk from Žába illegally. Žába was Lexa’s assistant and Lexa did not go to the faculty at all. Among others I always used to collect maps and I had a respectable collection of the maps of Egypt. Žába was interested in them, so he picked the writing desk up and moved it to Průšek. I don’t know the name of the person who reportedly should guarantee the furnishing of the rooms. At any rate he worked in the following manner: we walked through the halls and opened the doors secretly. When there was no one inside, he picked the coat stand or whatever was there and so. Sounds like a joke, but it was as I say.

O. L.: The establishment of sinology was a matter of higher places in most cases – the government decision issued saying: now we need sinology for some political or economical reasons. And thus it was enforced. In our country this came from bellow. The initiative of professor Průšek and his followers was very important in the whole process, which is after all deeply rooted in the cultural background: we had Mathesius, all of our artists knew China and received it with enthusiasm. I think we bring an alternative story of the formation of the new field of study.

I was lucky to experience the atmosphere of Sorbonna or England as well as the universities in western Germany, Poland, Italy and so forth. I can say there was something that marked us out from others. Sinology of those countries was limited by the scientific or quasi-scientific approach. We all had to act as the propagators of China, we translated, gave the lectures, we opened the exhibitions etc. Although it was pretty annoying sometimes and sometimes even to the detriment of our own work, our sinologists had a close contact with the audience and informed general public about Chinese events and production. This made us different from the western colleagues. The number of Chinese books we translated was enormous in comparison with the western world at that time. There was one more relevant fact. The Chinese delegation came to Prague in 1949, even before the PRC was established. The delegation leader was Guo Moruo, and besides him Xu Beihong and other
people came, who played a major part in Chinese cultural life after the 1st October that year. Their actual destination was Paris, where a peace congress took place, but they were not given the visas and stayed in Prague for two or three weeks. We encountered them, our students encountered them, Guo Moruo got a honorary doctorate... But the most important fact is that they brought relatively many materials from Yan’an and north-eastern China or even from Beijing. Beijing was in hands of people’s forces at that time. All this was completely unknown in Europe. We could thus translate it immediately. The translations of the things published in Yan’an and north-eastern China before 1949 were the first translations from Chinese to some European language.

O.L.: They were delegates of Yan’an?

No. They were in Beijing already.

O.L.: When did they come exactly?

April 1949, perhaps the 20th or 21st of April. It was the day when people’s forces arrived to Nanjing, and they were in Beijing for several months already at that time. Still before this event there was one Chinese representative in the International Student Union. I met him all the time. Our sinologists were in touch with the general public in contrast with the West. Moreover the older generation of orientalists even assumed that one should not speak colloquial language – it was considered a handicap. One was expected to study that what’s written: the ancient philosophy, the ancient religion, history and so on. When the research of colloquial language started besides the Sanskrit study, it was considered fantastic.

The authorities of the Austria-Hungary in Vienna had no reason to study China and arrange the conditions for people to study it. As you mentioned, it was not official matter in our country, the whole thing developed spontaneously. To be concrete: Průšeks *My sister China* was very popular at the end of the thirties and at the beginning of the forties, and *The Songs of Ancient China*. I owned various editions, and I managed to identify most of the poems.

Sun Dajin was the first Chinese to study engineering here. He stayed after war. We worked together from the year 1945 until the half of the fifties. After 1949 he came to our embassy in China as the interpreter. Before that he married Czech woman and he could not get used to the Beijing life. He came from Fujian, Beijing was strange to him, so he was eager to come back in here. I believe I helped him in this matter. We exported many products to China at that time, but there had no Chinese annotations. The director of chamber of commerce visited China at that time. I told him it would be practical for the chamber to employ some technician-specialist, who could be responsible for the Chinese annotations to the products. They decided he [Sun Dajin] could come back and employed him as the technician. Anyhow, he died soon.

When Průšek tried to enforce something for the existence of the discipline in 1947 or 1948, he got always the same stereotypical answer: we are in the middle of building a two-year plan, we have no time now. After PRC was established, this changed overnight. The authorities wanted crowds of people who would be able to speak Chinese, in the shortest possible time. The only perspicacious were people in the Baťa company, Svit. Svit sensed the importance of Chinese market even in 1948, one year before the PRC was established. The Palacký University in Olomouc was re-established under rector Fišer. They were interested in Orient. Lesný was a dean of the faculty and thus an
Orient-core developed. Průšek went there from the beginning, later, in 1947 he sent me to teach the beginners. From 1947 I went to Olomouc regularly, I lectured and took the language courses. In 1948 Zlín contacted me – they offered lectures eight hours weekly, I went there regularly, too. Friday afternoon and Saturday morning I taught there. On Mondays and Tuesdays I worked in Prague. On Wednesdays and Thursdays I was in Olomouc, and Friday and Saturday in Zlín. On Saturdays I started to lecture at six o’clock in the morning and finished at ten, then I was placed in the car and chauffeured to the Otrokovice airport. Czech Aerolines didn’t exist at that time. I travelled with a special society Svitlet, they used small six-seat planes, pre-war Junkers, Dakotas, Iljushins. They took me to Prague and at the weekend I could prepare for the next run.

Průšek gave lectures systematically from 1947, we helped him as much as we could. The students had no chance to apply their knowledge directly in China or even to apply spoken Chinese they studied. Průšek chose the texts in baihua, but it was supposed that the knowledge would stay people’s hobby or that it would be used for translating and so. It was not supposed that our graduates would use spoken Chinese in China or that they would go to China at all. The first students went to China at the beginning of the fifties, they spent six or seven years there and came back at the end of the fifties. Průšek always highlighted the importance of spoken language, his demands were absolute. Everyone should understand spoken Chinese. He denied many people who were sent to the OI as the political workers. Although the native speakers came relatively soon, the oldest generation had practically no chance to speak Chinese – of course we spoke Chinese, but it was Chinese in the European sense, you know. I remember it was very difficult to get used to the real spoken Chinese in China later. The best school was however the journey with Army Artists Ensemble.

We had to translate folk songs to Chinese, it was always terrible for me. I remember I was expected to translate “Strejček Nimra koupil šimla za půl páta dolaru, příšel domů, popad ženu, tancoval s ní maděru.” The second strophe: “Srejček Matěj šel jest na frej, šel jest skrze kuchyni, a ony ho celičkýho děvečky tam polily.” I used to work together with a Chinese on it. When it came to the line “maids poured water at him”, the Chinese thought hard and asked me: Yong shenme shui, shi kaishui, haishi liangshui? I did not know indeed, but still, I don’t think hot water was used.

I taught at the School of oriental languages from 1946. Anyone who reached fifteen years could join it and many people did. I remember I was perplexed in one situation as the young assistant, when the dignified elder lady appeared and told she was the psychic at Smíchov. The lady was inspired by the medium which told her she would be born a Chinese in her next life, and since she heard Chinese is a difficult language, she would like to study it in advance. Another person came to me: a man who told me he had mastered three kilos French and four kilos German and wanted to start with Chinese. I did not know what was going on, but it was logical: he was not interested in generating but one sentence. As soon as he mastered a new word, he wrote it on a sheet of paper weighing I don’t know how many decimals of gram. He owned a file and the weight of those cards showed his language knowledge.

O.L.: This is a good idea! We could recommend this method to our students! As soon as you master five kilos of words, come to the final exams.

And do you know how the Egyptology department was established? Lexa found it. Lexa was a teacher at the gymnasium in Hellichova street before the Second World War. He had certain Václav Kopecký
among his students, who was a terrible scoundrel at that time. He and his friend registered for the December Stephan swimming competition on Vltava River. They jumped in the river, but they unfortunately could not swim. Of course this event totally messed the whole race up, they had to be rescued and anything. When it came to the director, he wanted to exclude them from all the schools of Austria-Hungary realm. The only person standing by them was Lexa. When he wanted to found the Egyptology Institute in the fifties, he visited Kopecký (who was a minister of culture at that time), reminded him of this old event and got the money.

Interview with professor Palát, 2nd part

15th June 2010

[at the beginning of collaboration of Chinese and Czechoslovak academies of sciences]... There were the huge discussions among the Chinese how to make the terms. We had the texts in Czech and in English and Chinese had the English texts for a discussion, and Chinese specialists from various workplaces had absolutely different opinions on generating the terms. We more or less imitated Greek or Latin terms with just a slight modification in Czech Republic, but Chinese created the term as a definition.

The first contract was signed in the year 1956, the second in 1960. In both cases I took part and prepared the materials. It was a tricky job sometimes. Taken psychologically: the new materials were comprehensible to a broader audience than in our country. When one doesn’t know the background of the word “satelit” [satellite], what can one imagine under it? And look at Chinese: renzao weixing. Everyone can understand. Similarly, we do have “metro” in Czech, “podzemní dráha” [underground railroad]. In Chinese this is delicate for the interpreters, as they have to learn those terms, on the other hand in European languages they sound approximately...

[In Tibet] everything was cheap in comparison with what one paid for the same things in Beijing. When we were in Tibet, the only valid currency was the yuanshikai dollar. Nobody accepted the Chinese currency, except of the post offices, or when we stayed in military camp... But no merchants accepted Chinese money. Yuanshikai dollars were pretty heavy. Moreover the copper Tibetan money served as a loose cash. We could change any amount of Chinese money for the dollars, whereas our Chinese accompaniment had the tough limits. After mutual arrangement we changed the money for them. Why did they do it? Because on their way back to Beijing they were selling things: let the Tibet price be X, one hundred kilometres behind Tibet border the price was X plus I don’t know how many percent, and the price was rising up until Beijing.

How you became a diplomat?

At our embassy in China there was a kulturni přidělenec of course, originally someone, who wasn’t a member of the diplomatic body, but was subordinated to the ministry of information. Doctor Hrdlička was there at that time. This changed later and he became a standard diplomat in the order of rank. The lowest rank is the attaché, there are the third, the second, and the first secretary, counsellor, and finally ambassador. The diplomat for culture usually started as the first secretary and later he became wenhua canzang, cultural attaché. When the term run out, it means three or four years abroad, and doctor Hrdlička was to come back, professor Průšek suggested me to replace him. So I got to Beijing and from 1954 until 1958 I was there. It was a very interesting job, because one
could get to... On one hand one had the official contacts with the ministry of culture, the ministry of education or foreign affairs, and with various writers unions and so on. On the other hand: I had my personal contacts, because the acquaintance with significant representatives of culture I more or less inherited from professor Průšek, who acquainted himself with them in the thirties. They were young people at that time, and suddenly they held posts of ministers. Or I acquainted myself with them already in Prague during their visit – for instance Guo Moruo. So I was able to orient myself in the contemporary Chinese culture and, additionally, I didn’t need the interpreter. This was very important – I came very near to the leading representatives of culture. I even managed to break the wall existing in China: people accepted one on the official level, but it was almost impossible to get on to the private personal level. I was lucky to visit people on various occasions, even at home, and I went to Chinese restaurants with them, QianDiFenzi yan was a famous one at that time. For me it was useful that I accompanied Army Artistic Ensemble for several months, so I knew the army representatives or their collaborators. Besides what was prepared by the Chinese side itself (culture programmes for diplomats or for public) another thing was important: culture societies, ensembles or individual artists frequently came from the whole world, especially from Asia. So I had the opportunity to meet them – sometimes there were fifty so called cultural events in a month. I had a lunch somewhere, I had a cocktail then somewhere else, a cultural show in the evening. I saw practically all of the theatre shows that took place, I became acquainted with various kinds of theatres, actors, for instance Bai-yan... She was the one who became famous in the thirties in the movie Shizi jiekou, Crossroads. There was a comical pun in the movie, criticizing China’s losses on export – because China had to buy things from abroad and paid by silver for it. The scene was following: the actor took the silver coin in his mouth and said: baiyin chukou. People understood he says “silver passes away abroad”, but he only said chukou! I remember one interesting event: Sihanuk came with his ensemble consisting of his maybe children or relatives – because with Sihanuk one could never be sure which of his wives or how many of them would accompany him... And there was one song in China at that time, how it starts... XYXYX, Dongfang hong..., majestic song sang as the anthem. And on the official show, attended by Zhou Enlai and whatever, the Sihanuk ensemble played it in a rock’n’roll style. Imagine the people! But Zhou Enlai did nothing...

Could you please tell us which of the artists and celebrities you personally knew? And Průšek knew whom?

As far as writers are concerned, I frequently went around with Mao Dun, Shen Yanbing, because he was the culture minister. Mao Dun used to ask me out to restaurants and so on. Ai Qing. Perhaps I told you the first poem of Ai Qing translated to Czech was mine, we translated it with Halas and it was published in the book Cesta do rudé Číny (The Journey to Red China). With Lao She we had a close relationship. Ding Ling, Ba Jin, at random. And the painters... I knew Qi Baishi, I was the only stranger invited to his funeral. I knew Li Geran very well. Hu Baoshi, in Nanjing, Wu Zuoren. Hua Jinwu, you know the name, he was in Prague, too. I exploited the advantage that I knew those people before: doctor Hájek was in China before I came and he bought some things and left twenty thousands yuan there, meant for some other purchase for national gallery. I created a committee of the well-known Chinese painters, who helped me to make my choice. I spent all the money in the gallery thanks to the friends. And I knew musicians – Ma Sizong, Fu Song, he was a younger man, pianist, his father was a teacher in Shanghai. Fu Song studied Chopin in Warsaw.
O.L.: Fu Songs father translated Balzac from French, didn´t he...

Yes. Fu Song studied Chopin in Warsaw, I remember once we sat as usual, Fu Song, Li Geran – who was in Prague, too, the best Pushkin translator to Chinese, and Sviatoslav Richter – I knew him well. When he came to Beijing for the first time, he – I beg your pardon – omitted (vykašlal se na) the soviet embassy and let me show him round Beijing. His wife Dorliac was there, too, she was a soprano, and since Fu Song was under the influence of the Warsaw teachers, he called Chopin a revolutionary. Richter got awfully angry and slated him, that Chopin was a lyric, not a revolutionary. You may know that Fu Song stayed in Europe during the Cultural Revolution and got married with Menuhins daughter, he even visited Bratislava – but he never came to Prague.

Let me ask more about the list... Průšek knew whom, and who did you acquainted?

Guo Moruo and Mao Dun were inherited from Průšek.

And you knew Zhen Zhenduo, Průšek did, too.

Sure, sure!

And Průšek did know Ding Ling? I don’t think so. He talks about her in My sister China, but he did not meet her.

No, no. Mao Dun, Ai Qing, Lao She. Maybe I told you, in the beginnings of fandui youpai I had a dinner with Mao Dun and Ai Qing. We had a nice talk in the Fenziyan restaurant. The next day I read Shen Yanbings article in Renmin ribao, vehemently attacking Ai Qing. When I conferred on that with Ai Qing the same evening, I told him about how this was possible, and he replied: who was undersigned, Mao Dun, or Shen Yanbing? Shen Yanbing is the minister of culture, such things belong to his job and it does not affect our friendship. Hardly understandable, isn’t it? I was lucky, Guo Moruo, whom I frequently visited, showed me things hardly seen by anyone. Zhou Enlai, during his studies in Nanjing University, planned to become the actor of ženských rolí in the Beijing Opera. And Guo Moruo showed me a lot of photos, where Zhou Enlai acts v ženských úlohách. And later, as you know, the western world pressed China into the war against Germany and Rakousku Uhersku, not because they needed to implement the military actions in Asia, but they presumed that several thousands of Chinese KULI would go to France in order to fill French men: France suffered a terrible loss by Verden, they wanted to release the workers from factories and replace them by Chinese. Zhou Enlai organized it and he continued in politics afterwards.

Are you talking about the project jian gong jian xue?

Yes, yes. Talking about this... I liked the backstage matters. The western pressure was aimed at the Beijing government. There was Sunyatsens vzorovláda in Canton. Sunyatsen didn’t approve China’s participation in the war much, but he still hesitated. China was neutral and the German embassy was in Beijing, where certain mister Grimm served as a physician. He was professor Grimm’s father – professor Grimm was a sinologist, originally working in Bochum and later replacing Eichhorn in Tübingen. The German embassy sent doctor Grimm to Canton, although Sunyatsen himself was a doctor, to help Sun cure the patients. At the same time he was expected to persuade Sun to make Chinese government not to join war against Germany. So, I had chances... For instance when Qi
Baishi died, there was a huge retrospective exhibition. I had Lao She for companion and he knew the
gushi about every single picture. I visited Ai Qing in the ninety’s: his right hand was practically
immobile, he lived in a retirement home and his speech was halting. He gave me two books, maybe
they are among the materials I donated to faculty. I liked him very much! Danuška Šťovíčková used to
translate his work.

You mentioned your friendship with Malmquist, could you say something more about that?

Understandably, there were the sinologists among other embassies employees. Van der Loon worked
at Netherlands embassy, although he used to be very strict in claiming he was no Dutch, but
Freeees. Later he worked in England, at the court. Malmquist worked at the Swedish embassy, and
we used to meet every day from the first half of the fifties. Cultural workers of embassies had the
opportunity of attending some cultural events almost every day. I was advantaged, because the
other workers weren’t equipped with the language abilities, and I received many many invitations to
various cultural actions, which took place at the English speaking embassies from Europe, England,
Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and from English speaking Asia – Barma, India,
Ceylon, Pakistan. French speaking embassies were those from Afghanistan. English speaking Arabians
came after 1956 after Bandung. First contact with Arabian diplomats was very interesting, they said:
Czechoslovakia, well, we know, we had one great statesman there, Hitler, the German who
persecuted Jews!

I’d like to get back little bit, you said professor Průšek recommended you for embassy, how this
worked institutionally? Or did he tell you and you went to apply for it?

I was called. Usually I never applied, but if I was called... This happened in the ninety’s, too, when
Czechoslovakia fell apart. They called me to become an ambassador in China, but I denied it with
respect to my age... Moreover my wife was ill, I held a post of vicepresident in the Russian
association of Chinese studies, so I denied and recommended colleague Fass. It was the same in the
case of international lectures – I was not sent out, but invited, for example DAAD (Deutsche
Akademische Austausch Dienst) invited me to the BRD. Usually the invitation came after I presented
my paper in some congress – somebody looked me up and invited me.

We are talking about the time after you came back from China of course...

Until that time it was not possible – at the first half of the fifties it was not possible. I came back from
China in 1959, and thereafter such things were possible already. The first international friendship we
established was with France. In 1956 the French sinologists delegation came to Beijing, which was
lead by professor Gernet I think, and then, 1960 there was an Orientalist congress in Moscow – with
the so called Young sinologists congress as its part. We’ve met there and made the agreement: why
should we associate only with the Soviets or the DDR, when we would welcome contacts with France
as well... The other side agreed, and in 1961 they invited Průšek, Pokora and me to France. We spent
one month there, they showed us anything. We had a meeting with many of the sinologists. They
came in return in 1962 and thereafter we invited them not only to the isolated lectures... I gave the
lectures in Nancy, Bordeaux, on Ecole de langues orientales, or in Sorbonna, Collège de France...

Who were those Frenchmen who came in 1962?
Gernet, who was my closest friend and colleague in France — we correspond up to now. When I came to France for the shorter time, I stayed in his place. His wife was a high-school teacher, she taught on the prestigious lyceum.

Almost all photos are in the Archive of the Academy of Sciences: the manuscripts, the congress reports, my correspondence. I maintained a correspondence with almost all the leading sinologists in the US, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, so the Archive took it. And I told them to publish it not before I die. But sometimes, when needed, I refer to the Archive, and it’s lovely cited: let’s say correspondence “from A. Paláts inheritance”. According to them I’m dead already.

*Did Průšek speak French?*

Yes, but usually he preferred German and English. In my generation we were taught German od primy and then we were sent to the “handl”: every year one went to the German village for a month, where nobody was able to speak Czech. But I started to attend gymnasiurn in Valašské Meziříčí, then we moved to Olomouc, where 25 percent of the population were Germans — we had our German friends, it was pretty normal to speak partly German partly Czech. In 1937 it was so sad for us to see that those friends changed overnight, that they became aggressive and started to behave ugly.

The second language was Latin and French. English was not taught at the gymnasiurns, only on the academies of commerce, so I had to study English privately. When I came to Prague, the universities were closed — it was in 1943. After the graduation exam one had no other choice but to attend abiturientsky course. I chose strojařinu, later I was totalně nasazený and from 1943 I was TN in the Avia factory. I utilized all the evenings. The amount of our working time started on fifty three hours a week, then it had RISE//rose to seventy two hours. From seven to nine p.m. I attended the language courses, English, Chinese, Spanish, Russian and so forth. Later at the embassy I was forced to speak various languages, it was necessary. Having the training from learning Chinese was truly worthwhile. When we wandered around China with the Army Artistic Ensemble, we went to the different provinces and contacted the military unit workers, who spoke many ways, so I got used to it. It was then I learned all those XXXXXXX 4.soubor, 7.minuta, and so on. AAE needed to go to the hospital frequently, sometimes I accompanied them, and I remember the word erbihou, ORL.

*Hopefully we get to this later! Now I have one more question. I tried to reconstruct the development of the Far East Department, what was its name and the organization reforms…*

Průšek’s higher doctorate falls on the autumn in 1945. Until that time no place existed, where… Dvořák’s death meant the end of the sinology tuition, of Chinese, at the Faculty of Arts. As soon as Průšek got the higher doctorate, he became the so called private associate professor. It was impossible to study Chinese as a proper degree course. Průšek got a salary, there was no such a discipline as sinology. Those few people I adduced as I was talking about the war: Krebová, his second wife, Skalička, me, Smrž, Borák, the married couple Hrdlička’s, they usually used the possibility of studying another discipline — some of them came around to religion studies to Pertold, some of them took English at the faculty and they did not come back to sinology again, some of them went to study the law. I’ve never ever attended one single lecture, I only did the examinations. Of
course I registered for all the Průšeks lectures and some other various lectures that attracted me, especially in English literature, for instance Vočadlo...

What else did you attend?

The English literature, and for example the histology. I took part in the neurology seminars at the Faculty of Medicine. One of my friends, doctor Rádl, Emanuel Rádl's nephew, studied the neurology, afterwards he worked as the senior consultant on neurology. His wife was a doctor – she comes to me frequently nowadays. I was interested in the reactions of people who were injured as the drivers of tanks and had some neurological problems. Professor Henner, by the way a father of Marie Pujmanová, used to do this.

Well. Průšek was 1947 appointed a professor, so the discipline and the seminar were established.

And it was called...?

Later, in 1948 it was called the Far East Department. Three departments existed, the Near East, the Indology, the Far East. The Near East Department included Egyptology and the ancient Near East, Arabian and Iranian studies. On the faculty there was professor Lexa, his followers were Zába, Vahala. Ancient Near East: Hrozný, Matouš, Souček. Tauer on the Turkish studies, Rypka for the Iranian studies, Růžička for Arabian studies, Petrášek. Veselý came as the younger one. On the Far East Department there was Průšek. Originally there was not even one room for him to work, but he obtained one room in the Oriental Institute in the second floor. The Oriental Institute was originally situated in the Lobkowicz Palace together with the Slavonic Institute. Masaryk decreed their establishment in the beginning of the twenties, and until 1944 it resided there. In 1944 the Palace was occupied by the Nazis. We helped with the library removal to Vinohrady. In 1945 the Palace was used by some institution engaged in the displaced persons homecoming and in the return of the prisoners coming back from the concentration camps. The OI got one half of the building of Maltese Knights, the second half went to the National Museum – they had a music department there. So it was at this time Průšek got one room in the second floor, where we sat. For some time Stunová worked there as an assistant...//pomocná vědecká síla// and Šejnohová as well. After one year the Far East Department was established, and got two rooms in the faculty building upstairs. The windows of one room directed to the Prague Castle, the other to the UMPRUM and the Jewish cemetery. A library was there, a workroom, and the lectures took place here. The number of students was small, they were only three or four, so there was no reason to give us some lecture hall. The lectures took place just in the department room.

And Průšek was the head of department.

Průšek was the head of the department. In 1947 I wanted to come to the Faculty permanently, but Průšek told me (since I had several months to my graduation): finish it, just as a precaution. So I did it, afterwards I signed in the Faculty of Arts and I graduated there in 1953. Further: after the war one more student attended Průšeks lessons: Husárek. He was a general, one of the prominent generals of the year 1938. He was a chief of our delegation to the USSR in 1938. On the basis of his report on the soviet army (that it is a very strong one)... Beneš mentions this in his memoir, when the soviet-german war started and the Westerners were convinced that the Germans would repeat the Blitzkrieg and USSR capitulates in few weeks.... Beneš was the only one to warn that Soviets would
resist – on the basis of Husárek’s report. In 1938 he was in Sirový’s government and during the war he worked in the Škoda factory. In his old age he began to devote himself to Chinese and registered as a full time student.

Who else gave the lectures there?

Průšek was the only one at the beginning. Later I did the beginners works, because I was entrusted by Průšek with the beginners lectures on the School of Oriental Languages from 1946. Officially, SOL was appended to the Oriental Institute, later even to the Academy of Commerce in Resslova Street. The exercises on SOL were valid as the university lessons. As I told you last time, the students of the European languages, literatures and history had certain knowledge of language, history and literature from high school. Our students knew absolutely nothing about China. So we started with the basic outline of geography, history, literature. Usually I was a person to do this. The language courses were based on the Průšek’s textbook intended for Baťa. For spoken Chinese we had a very rich material, prepared in Czech language by Pultr, arranged then for various languages – I translated it into Chinese with Sun Dajin. Sun Dajin was a first student from China. He studied the engineering in the half of the thirties, later he worked in Škoda factory and after 1935 (divně datum) he was sent to China and worked as the interpreter at the embassy. He married a Czech woman and wanted to get back to Czechoslovakia. I managed to help him, because I persuaded the director of the business chamber, that it is better to send our products not only with Russian legends, but with Chinese – and that Sun Dajin is the one who can arrange it. Well, we had some spoken texts, which we used and reproduced. We had no other texts, not a dictionary at that time. Perhaps I mentioned the fact that after 1949 we got help from the Chinese, who claimed themselves to be citizens of PRC and wanted to come back to China from America. In Prague they had to wait for processing their formalities, because there was no Chinese embassy here at that time, only in Moscow. Maybe I described the troubles we had with their passports. There were several dozens of them, businessmen and so forth, and they were called to register as the PRC citizens, otherwise they should leave our republic. They mostly registered. Their passports were issued in the Kuomintang era in south China, with some puzzled English transcription. Getting new passports now, they had the same characters inside, but the transcription was Russian. And when they came to our offices with the Russian transcription, which was substantially different from the previous English one, they did not want to accept it. We had to issue a statement that concerned person, called something, written XY in characters, transcription XY, is identical to person… and so on. It was fun! Krebsová started to give the lectures, later Kalvodová, and Šťovíčková and Šejnohová served as the pomocné vědecké síly. And that’s all… up to my departure in 1954. Later Král came.

And how the department changed institutionally?

Institutionally… All happened within the framework of the reform. A department replaced a chair. In the past the teacher had the chair in his field of study. The chair was bound to him personally, and he had the assistant professors or assistants and so forth. The department was broader at that time, the Far East consisted of sinology, Japan studies and Korean studies; Near East department there was Iran, Arabian studies etc. Within the framework of the department the teacher as the representative of the subject… nahrávka!!!, it was not autonomous, but much more integrated into the department.

When did the reform take place?
In 1948 I think.

And professor Král came before you went to China?

No, much later, he graduated in the second half of the fifties. The students until 1948 were Šejnohová, Kalvodová, Bayerleová, Šťovíčková, Heroldová... Some of them disappeared and never came back. Before the department was established it was impossible to study a single subject at the faculty, one had to combine the disciplines. English and Sinology, History and Sinology, etc. When the students realized they had no chance to apply in sinology or Orient studies, they preferred the other subject. Průšek arranged the combination of Sinology and Far East history. They were officially two subjects, but the content was more or less the same.

Did Průšek work in the Oriental Institute while teaching at the faculty?

No. He came there after the director Lesný died, it was in 1953. Until 1953 he was exclusively the employee of the faculty – from 1948 until 1953. When he went to the Institute, he was replaced in the department by Mrs. Hilská. In Japan studies there were Novák, Boháčková. You know what kind of troubles she had? Well, you knew professor Vočadlo. In the early twenties he worked as a teacher in England and his wife was there with him. They had a son there. In Anglo-Saxon countries, when it comes to nationality, no ius sanguinis, but ius soli is applied. It means one automatically has the citizenship of that certain country where one was born. So Vočadlo’s son was a British citizen. Of course he was our citizen, too. After 1948 or 1949, I don’t know exactly, our government decided that everyone had to choose his citizenship: in case of choosing Czechoslovak citizenship one looses the English, in the opposite case one must leave Czechoslovakia in forty eight hours. Miss Boháčková dated young Vočadlo and they had a white wedding, which was not accepted by the state. Vočadlo decided to choose the British citizenship, he had to leave and she tried to escape. She was caught somewhere in Slovakia and judged. Her father was a professor of the Roman law at the faculty of law, and he looked me up – I knew him, because he examined me during my study there. Now he came, he drafted a statement of defence, which only Průšek undersigned, and this statement helped her – she was sentenced to only one year. She wasn’t allowed to work at the faculty, for some time she worked in the municipal library, but in the sixties she was back at the faculty. The members of the department were Pultír for Korean studies, Poucha was the external lecturer for Mongolian studies. Later Král came and it was further extended by students coming back from China: Střeleček, Vochala...

In 1953 Průšek went to the OI, the head of the department was Hilská – was it still called the Far East Department?

Yes. In the sixties still FED.

Král came at the end of fifties?

Later, I would rather say – in the beginning of the sixties. He was originally in the OI, and it was a question whether he should stay there. Průšek offered him to go to the faculty.

He did his candidacy in the OI under Průšek?
Yes, yes. There were perhaps twenty sinologists in the OI during the sixties. I can tell you all the names.

At a certain moment the Far East Department became The Department Sciences of Asian and African countries. When was that?

I don’t know. When I came back from China, Průšek wanted me to do his deputy in the OI, so I followed the development of the department just until 1954... And I did not follow the department any more, I only gave lectures there from time to time. But I was very busy in the OI, moreover we started to take part in the international congresses, I was asked to lecture abroad – England, France, Holland, Western Germany, Italy, NDR, Poland etc. I gave lectures at the 17th November University, at the Faculties of Education in Prague and in České Budějovice. PFE had its building in M.D. Rettigové street, but the lectures usually took place in Stará Boleslav.

What were these lectures about?

About the history of China – partly the mediaeval history, partly the modern history.

For the teachers of history...

I went to the faculty of education in Prešov, too. They used to organize the annual educational weeks for their history teachers from the whole Slovakia. We held lectures on various countries of Asia – China, Japan, India. It was very interesting: those people buried us in questions.

So, when did it change institutionally, I don’t know.

I’ll go on searching, I was in the archive, but the archives were partly destroyed in 1990, and people’s memories are approximate...

I always had the lists of lectures, in Olomouc and here – but some of the students took it every time and worked with that... In Olomouc the lectures started in 1946, when the university was re-established. Lesný was a dean, and Průšek started lectures in sinology as a private assistant professor. In 1947 Průšek sent me to do that. It lasted for four years, from 1948 to 1951. The name of the department was beautiful: The department of the remaining //ostatní// philology. There was sinology, indology, Pořízka went there and Danuška Šťovíčková as well. The Classical philology belonged there. Novotná //Heřmanová// gave lectures. Ohnesorg and Hála went to teach phonetics and for some reason aesthetics was there, professor Markalous, Jaromír John. I was a young assistant, and by accident I sat near him and he always used to say: remember, gentlemen, women are creatures made from different material! I never understood this.

The institutional changes of the seventies, I don’t know.

In the sixties I gave lectures there from time to time, but mostly I was either in France for the whole trimester or I lectured at some of the universities. I used to come to western Germany Universities very often: Tübingen, Bonn, Bochum, Marburg, Würtzburg, Hamburg, München etc. And another advantage of the OI was that we had close contacts to the main representatives of sinology in the West. As far as the eastern countries are concerned, there was Böhring in the DDR and Breutigam, who frequently visited Prague. In Poland there was Chmielewski, Źwikowski and Kunstler. From the
Soviet Union we had contacts with Ejdlin, literary historian, Tichinsky, Sorokin, Spiessniev, Kroll. In Hungary we knew Czongor, Tököy, and that was all, we knew no one in Bulgaria and Romania. This shows to the fact that we turned to the West. There were dozens of friends, Démiéville, Gernet, Elisejev, Erouet, Caltire, Bianco, Holzmann – he was in Triélle, Gernet was in Bouddarlin, which is in the south. We knew Stein, who was a Tibetanist, German Jew, he left Germany because of Hitler, in 1933 he was in France and then escaped to Vietnam.

He wrote a beautiful book about bonsai...

He was saved by one villager there, she hid him and they got married later, came to France and lived together until the end of their lives. He lived in XXXX, and when he retired, he went to Medon, a suburb, where Štefánik worked in the observatory. Once one of the students at Sorbonna University came to greet me, some baron, “von”, and he told me his grandma inducted Štefánik in the higher French society. In Villefroy there lived Derotour.

Examination system in ancient China...

Deroutour family used to have a beautiful small castle, it was the fourth richest French family. I went there frequently, he was never a teacher, he was just on his own and his library was huge! All the French sinology students lived on managing it. And when he organized all these suppers, which were unusually noble from our point of view, with the ringing and coming of the chamberlain... In his old age he had a nurse sitting beside him. When I came to this situation for the first time, Mistress Derotour told me I didn’t need to talk to a nurse, she is only a nurse, not their guest... And she said once, yesterday we had **raut** and drank twenty bottles of whiskey and just two bottles of cognac! **Uala France!!!**

Well, that’s understandable...

In Belgium we knew **Elechils at Universite Libre**. From Holland I would name Zürcher and Liang at first place.

Yes, James Liang...

And from France, well, everyone... Elisejev was the director of the **Museum XXX**.

And Daniil Elisejev is his daughter?

Yes, yes. He had a brother, Nikita. Nikita was the director of museum in Beirut and his father was a japanologist at Harvard. He escaped from Russia in 1918, he went through Siberia to the United States and his family worked as a tsarist **court purveyor** for few hundred years. In the sixties one still used to call the luxury delicatessen shop on the Kuzněvsky bridge “at Eliseevs”. Professor Eliseev worked as the (anti)Japan consultant in Pentagon. He told me about some ideas they handled: Japanese consider walking under the ladder misfortune: consequently the idea appeared to connect two airplanes by a ladder and send them above the Japanese battle lines. Or another: it is very ridiculous for Japanese to see a naked man. One recommended to Americans to disembark naked, wearing nothing but helmet, just to show they are soldiers. To go for a dinner with him, it meant half an hour a discussion with a waiter, where was the vine from, south part, north part, and such discussions. When his colleagues from the USSR came to to France for the first time met him, they
asked him, how was this possible: your family was that rich, and now in France you are so rich again! He replied: what do you mean, rich, I have a directors salary, but rich...? And they told him: all in all, Elisejsjike palja belong to you! They believed Champs Elysees belong to him... Well, excuse me to mock little bit this serious topic! But I always wanted to see the history from behind.

Still, I have to pose more formal question: I know you weren´t at the faculty that much in the sixties, but could you tell me how the broadened academic exchange affected tuition, for instance the libraries, taught topics... The OI had rich international contacts, how the Far East department was affected?

Of course faculty had its own sources to enrich itself, there were Chinese language assistants, partly all the OI visitors gave lectures at the faculty. And, the OI had three departments, Near East, India and Far East. FE was sinology, Japan studies, Korea studies, and Vasiljev for Vietnam. When Průšek was in Prague (and he frequently was not – he held many functions, FILM, CIPSCH, UAI, where he was a general secretary, or deputy director, and he went there very often, and very often left for some lecture), he organized the Wednesday sinology meetings: the faculty members and the OI participated. We reported on new publications, informed each other about a progress in the pedagogical and research activity. It was very close cooperation between the OI and the FED. We attended faculty meetings, sometimes Průšek, but mostly me. Many people gave lectures at the faculty, sometimes once-and-for-all, but sometimes the whole semester, Švarný did it very often, Kalousková... The cooperation was common at that time, one did not differentiate very clearly between the workplaces and their administrative classification: someone worked under the faculty, someone under the ministry of education, or the ministry of foreign affairs – UMPE (International Politics and Economy Institute). People from UMPE visited us and we attended their meetings, and they were subordinated to ministry of foreign affairs. Janouš, Dřínek, they were there. Janoušová worked in the OI, until she lost in France.

And the doctoral, candidate study was realized at the faculty as well as in the Institute?

Yes.

Pak střípky o tom, kde přednášel:

Twelve, thirteen hours on Sorbonna, or I lectured at Collége do France, not many our people gave lectures there! And SOAS, Royal Anthropological Society in London, I even have an appreciation from the British Museum somewhere, because I got something they did not have: a Zhuang language textbook.

I was quite interested in national minorities, when I was Lu Xun něco, I travelled around China for four months, northwest and southwest, with the Academy worker on the jeep, and I saw the minorities in the area where the Europeans appeared never before: Guizhou, Yunnan, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, I stayed in zhaodaisuo as well as in the monasteries and so.

But you didn´t publish on that topic very often!

I did, I published some of the lectures, something in the New Orient.
I collected a batik and other textile goods of the minorities, I put together a pretty good collection, I gave it to Zlata Černá. I had photos, I had jewels, silver jewels, I gave her everything.

_She is looking forward to establish a Museum of the folk art, but until now we didn’t succeed..._

Zhen Zhenduo was a XXX at that time, I knew him very well. He often invited me for dinners. Pan Bocong, I took part in the opening works of Wanli tomb, and the beautiful tombs near Luoyang – Sanxia from Zhanguo times...

_Do you have some photos?_

Yes, yes. One had to rope down when it was being open in a quite primitive manner. And Zhen Zhenduo, I accompanied him on his last journey, which means when he fell down with the airplane – Spivák died, too. A very good man, well... As I say, plusquamperfektum!

_Last time we talked about how you gained a foreign currency through the book-purchase for your Italian colleges, you talked about the congress in America paid by the Ford funds. What were the financial resources? Something you got from the state, but how else did this work?_

I would say what we got from the state was a very small part of our funds. We went abroad thanks to the individual invitations. I could maybe sometime travel abroad at a state expense, but usually I was invited. I got the invitation from the institution, maximum I paid for the travelling expenses, sometimes even this was covered by the inviting institution. I paid for the visit: the accommodation, the diet. And when I stayed for a longer time, when I lectured the whole semester, I got the salary – not cash, they opened account automatically and paid everything by cheque. And now to the participation in the congress in 1967: the Ford foundation was so kind and for the occasion of the Orientalists congress paid a chartered plane for the guests from eastern and middle Europe which departed from Frankfurt. I knew the representative of the Ford foundation by accident, and when the congress was prepared, I lectured at Sorbonna – summer semester 1967. **People of UNESCO – UNESCO dispatched me to southeast Asia in 1964, where I spent four months, Malaysia, Borneo, Hongkong, Singapore, I gave lectures there and travelled a lot. So we got some places in the congress. But the colleagues from Moscow suddenly called me that everything was questionable, because of the war between Egypt and Israel, which started at that time. The Soviet Union wanted to make a gesture and not to participate in the congress in order to support the Egyptians, who would not come. I sent a telegram to the leader of the Egyptian delegation, and he answered: why not, we would go. Later, when I talked to Gafarov, the director, in December 1967 in Moscow, he told me he had not seen the article, someone from the official places signed it instead of him and he did not know. Well, the Soviet Union representative came to the Academy and said Soviets wouldn’t join the congress and they presumed we wouldn’t go either. I showed them they [Egyptians] were ready to go, but it had no use. Our Academy strictly prohibited the official delegation, which I should lead, since Průšek didn’t want to. Before this I arranged in the Fords foundation, that they could surrender the needless Soviet tickets to us. Many of our people, orientalists, signed up. We arranged the visa with the American embassy, there were no problems. I assumed that the private travels would be stopped again, so I posted following telegram instead of the delegation: By decision of authorities unable to attend the meeting, and I read the telegram. I convened the others and told them about the forthcoming danger of travel prohibition. Then we would act like this: people, who already
departed for their holiday, would receive a telegram announcing curfew, but that would be all I do. Everyone understood and took a holiday the same day. They had to wait in Frankfurt for two days. In 1967 it was not problem to get the foreign currency, so they obtained dollars and waited in Frankfurt for the chartered plane. Journey to the US, the return ticket, one week stay at the congress, food, accommodation, congress fees, ninety dollars.

Where did it take place?

In New York.

And who was there?

I don’t know, but many of our sinologists! Many of them. There were about one hundred of professional orientalists in Czechoslovakia at that time. Around sixty in the OI, circa twenty two at the faculty, the rest in the International Politics and Economy Institute, Náprstek Museum, National Gallery, Orientalists Cabinet in Slovakia and so on. There were about ten twelve our people abroad all the time, short term, long term. Rotterová, Kratochvíl, Velingerová, Kaucký, who was the economist, elder man, they all were abroad. Segert, Zvelebil were often abroad, Vaníčková, she did the Indonesia studies. We went abroad even one or two years after 1968, but it was limited – the number of people working abroad was not expected to increase. When somebody left, somebody had to come back again. There was one special limit for India for example: when one was there and drew a salary over one month, his salary here was stopped. With the exception of the mechanics and “those equal to them”. The director of Stavoprojekt or what was the company called, Mouliš, was my student in Zlín, a construction engineer, he was crazy about China. He started to study Chinese, he was at the embassy in China several times as the economic attaché or as a member of some group. Later he worked at Stavoprojekt and among other projects was a manager of Ráčí, which was a huge construction in India. We settled on a following practice: when somebody needed to go to India, he took the unpaid holiday and was registered as the employee of Stavoprojekt. Therefore he was regarded as a mechanic and his wife got the money. Xiang banfa. There was always a by-way...

I have some notice here XXXXXXX vše už je jinde...

In 1970 there was an international historical congress in Moscow. Král, the historian, the director of a soviet institute or what was it called, lead the delegation. But I was already written out, I could not join the delegation. But I was entrusted with the main paper in 1965, when the historical congress took place in Vienna. So: the journey there and back was paid and there was no need for the exit permit to the Soviet Union. So I went there! As I told you, I had trouble, because I read the main paper in the morning, which was positively accepted by the journalists, who invited me to the press conference. I held the press conference and our Czech Press Agency published it. Král gave no paper and I did, so I was punished.

I took part in the conference just the first day, later I travelled with the soviet colleagues, who reconstructed the monasteries around Moscow. The conference took place at the end of August, and 21st of August we had a meeting by Okudžava, I knew him very well, Maxim Rostropovič was there, Ljubimov, who was the director of Theatre Na Taganke.
As I told you last time, the OI received various questions, and I remember one, it was not a question: we received a letter from one Slovak man. He congratulated us on our friendship with the Slovaks, the oldest nation in the world. He proved that in an etymological way: the Slovaks are related to the Summers, because in Slovak language they have the word “somár” [mosquito], which proves Slovaks are the descendants of Summers.

Interview with professor Palát, 3rd part

8. 6. 2010

The journey to Tibet or with AAE (Army Artists Ensemble). And since I put anything on call, I used to acquire manifold Chinese newspapers. So there is many many newspapers from the journey to Tibet, the same applies to AAE, reports, announcements and anything...

... I was his [Průšek’s] closest workmate and I knew him from 1943 until his death, and after he was forced to leave Oriental Institute, for last ten years I used to pay a visit to him weekly. At the beginning he lost his concern about anything, but later he started to concern about sinology and China again. I was there when he was dying and thereafter I parted with him by cremation.

A.Z.: You wrote it was never the same Průšek, again...

Partly society ingratitude, but mainly the fact that his disciples were affected broke him. The oldest memories... You probably know //jste držela v ruce// the centennial anthology from colleague Velingerová... There are the oldest recollections of him. Only in years 1954-1959 I was in China, just for the short time I came to Czechoslovakia and saw him. The journey to Czechoslovakia was kind of eccentric, for as we were in Tibet, we paid a visit to panchenlama in Šikace. From him I received two snow panther. One died, and SHE, since I got female and male one, so she survived and for a short time after I came back to Beijing I raised her at home, but later she was one meter tall. Huge beast! I had to wear gloves. He always heeded me, because we shared sleeping bag when he was young. I didn’t know what to do with it, until I offered it to Prague ZOO, which accepted it happily. I agreed to deliver panther by the airplane by my way to holiday. And it was such an adventure I vowed I won’t do anything like this anymore. In Irkutsk I had no problem and it was token with a cage to depository. First problem emerged during departure in Beijing, because panther was in cage and we, me and my wife, took place in the last row of the plain, putting the cage beside. While taking off the animal was calm, but after that it started whimpering and seeking attention. So I took it out from the cage and put it on lap, which was a huge mistake, because of the dignified lady sitting in front of me. Panther put his front paws on the lady’s shoulder. When she sensed it, turned her head, she found out, that five centimetres from her face... She had hysterical fit and I was blamed. Further, when we arrived at Moscow and I came to the airport hotel, I was casted out: panthers do not let in. I didn’t know what to do, I had to wait for another connection until next day. Luckily enough, one of our pilots said: it’s
OK, we have an office here of our own; and he gave me hand to take panther in there. We opened the cage and let him enjoy little bit comfort. Let’s ignore the fact that he forgot to inform the cleaning lady, who came in the morning and the panther got out... But this was still not the end. The worse occurred in Prague, on the old airport, not the normal modern one. Getting off the plain I carried the cage partly covered by counterpane. Customs official, very bureaucratic, asked me what it was. I told him it was panther. He said, I’m in service, don’t be kidding, keep it for Dikobraz. I told him once more it was panther and opened the cage, if he insisted so much. Panther jumped out jako čertík z krabičky, crowd scattered... Fortunately it was obedient when I called it, and then the ZOO employees took it. Once more I met his reputation, on my way back to China after the holiday three weeks after. We flew to Moscow with some of our aircrafts and one of the pilots turned to me and asked, if I had come with the panther? And he continued, you know I almost got divorced because of you? I returned from Paris and my wife with our son was waiting for me in the airport. They saw the panther jumping out of the cage, which made my son screaming, because he wanted such a panther, too. A was very tired, so I flapped him several times and my wife told me I was brutal, well, exchange of opinions... So I vowed I want this no more in my life. When I came back to Prague after maybe three years, I went to the ZOO and he recognized me. I did not dare, it had cubs already, but it recognized me, when I was near the cage.

I went through Potala by invitation of Dalailama, and Dalailama showed me all the statues of previous Dalailamas. By one of the statues I asked, when was it when he died. He looked at me reprovingly and said, he didn’t die, he had reincarnated. In Tibet I was until 1956, but I had met Dalailama before in Beijing in 1954, he was nineteen then, born 1935, Panchenlama is 1937.

*What was your parent’s profession?*

My father was a railroad manager in Olomouc headquarters, so I was advantaged in the times of first republic: as a student I had cost price ticket on call, so I travelled through and through our country.

*When did you start with this?*

I started to travel alone in my thirteen fourteen. And later in Brno I was travelling and on the other hand I fell in love with the mountains. With friends we toured Czech and Slovak mountains all throughout. But I live in Prague since 1943, with the exception when I was abroad, that means... sixty seven years.

I passed my high school graduation exams in 1941, universities were closed and the only alternative were absolvent’s courses. Those I attended in Brno for some time and later I was toálně nasazený in Avie in Prague. I availed of this opportunity, since for a long time I was eager to know more about China, and I started to attend Chinese courses.

*How did you learn of them?*

Well, it’s normal, I was interested in various courses: I had English twice a week, Russian once a week, Spanish, Chinese once a week. It was quite usual to get such information. I lived in Žižkov at that time and the way to Avie and back lasted two hours. You went to Vysočany terminals, then to Krocínka in Prosek by foot, and there was the factory bus already waiting – it took us to Avie. You had to overcome three hundred and fifty stairs before you got from Vysočany to Prosek. I calculated: I came
back before seven p.m., popped off to Automat for quick supper and from seven till nine I had courses.

What was Průšek like as a teacher?

As the language basis he used his textbook written for Zlín in 1939. I used it for teaching for many years, too. XXXX At that time, until beginning of fifties we had no Chinese dictionaries, no materials, nothing, only what Průšek himself owned and what was in Oriental Institute Library, but there were no textbooks and dictionaries. It was a huge problem, we made photographic copies and so. Until 1949, as I already said, there was no concern for supporting Chinese studies at all. Whenever Průšek asked whatever, the answer was: we are building quarter and we are not interested in Chinese. After 1949 this changed of course. Suddenly authorities naively imagined overnight training of sinological experts, and bombarded with it. Unfortunately when they found out such training takes several years, they gave it up and occupied all the positions with non-sinologists, non-experts on China, and then, when the generation finished it’s studies in the half of the fifties, the places were no possible to get. It was a huge problem. As I said, Chinese studies were the matter of enthusiasts, at that time, they were eager to know China, country so different... There was one handicap from our recent viewpoint, and it lasted at least till sixties: when interested to study Roman languages, the student learned language at high school, knew history, culture, literature, anything from high school. This applies especially when it comes to Austria, Germany and so on, England, too. But take highschool textbooks of that time: you find maybe one page devoted to China, somewhere near the Egypt, Mesopotamia and India part. Literature – nothing, language they understandably did not know. It means, when we started lectures, we had to provide the kind of knowledge students interested in European cultures, literatures etc. gained in high school. We had to include basic lectures on history, literature, geography, language of course. We started as if they knew nothing. This was handicap our students had in comparison to other countries. The other disadvantage was that our graduates were bombarded, or voluntarily took to themselves the task of education wider population. This was not thinkable in the West. For instance professor Gernet wasn’t asked to translate anything, to give an opening speech for some exhibition, or to read some public lecture – maximum there was École XXXX in France, the school of oriental languages, called XXXX by the students, then renamed XXX, called XXXX. Graduates came on to practical professions. And as far as wide public education is concerned, there was Collège de France, the oldest scientific institution in Europe, built in 1582. Not taking into account the Arabic institutions in Spain, there was nothing like that. Professors got in their old age to Collège de France, and they were expected to give twelve hours of lectures annually, on whatever subject – otherwise they made research.

XXXX zkontrolovat nahrávku

...Were designed not only for sinologists, but for all intellectual public. Sorbonna, École, Santa Université XXXX, or beyond Paris there was Lyon, Bordeaux, or NANCY. I gave lectures in Bordeaux and in Nancy, too. Once there was VENSEN University besides Sorbonna in Paris, it was the Paris eastern suburbs. This university was designated for Algerian or African people, most of the students were foreigners. I did not give lectures there, but in Prague 17th November University. Lectures were given in French or English. I remember when I examined one of the African students, I asked him about his interests in modern Chinese history. He told me he was interested in Cankajšek. Well, tell
me something about him, said I. He contemplated for a pretty long time and said: I know nothing about him.

You said first students came disadvantaged. Were there some other sources of information about China? //zkontrolovat nahrávku//

... Well, literature... A summary perspective was given in Průšek’s My sister China, Mathesius’s translations served as enticement. You have to imagine the atmosphere of the Second World War, imminent danger, war events, apprehension danger, executions, and suddenly you got this, tranquillity and harmony in the poems, something completely new! It was the enticement. Later, after 1945 it was better. Students who were interested in China during Second World War were few. As I said, Mistress Krebsová, professor Skalička, Porák, who changed Chinese for law and stayed there, Smrž and Hrdličkovi. It is five or six people. After war it was better, press brought news about China, and we founded NO – it brought many many information about China, later followed NO Bimonthly – English, but for our people too. Everyone was seeking literature. P.S. Buck was popular at that time, The Good Earth – smooth to read, but her conception of Chinese women is not the best. She lived in the mission station, had contact with widows and so, timorous women, who were grateful for the help they obtained. Maybe you had an opportunity to meet some vigorous women in certain age, whose cadence is four hundred words in a minute... Thick skinned rikshaw man used to say, lao taitai jintian piqi bu hao, and was afraid...

//nahrávka!!!//

Mistress Krebsová was 1954 in China, and she was called lao taitai. As I said, until 1947 it was not possible to study sinology as a discipline. The lectures of professor Průšek as a private associate professor were irrespective of the existence of sinology. Professor Průšek’s lectures were about linguistics and later usually we took over the beginner’s lessons. I used to lecture in the School of oriental languages, on faculty and in Olomouc, too. There were elementary lectures on history and literature. In his language courses, Průšek read Laocan, usually something he was just translating. Mao Dun, Ziye. The tuition process was built on our regular homework, we had to search out the vocabulary. It was not the kind of lecture with the teacher on one side and the mass of students on the other... In those days class... well, there were no classes in 1948, there were three or four students of sinology... Bayerlová, then Kalvodová – born 1928 I believe, Hrdličkovi, as long as they were here, they spent one year maybe on Harvard. Husárek, it was quite interesting person, perhaps the name is unfamiliar to you? He was general Husárek, one of the prominent military representatives before 1938. 1938 he lead our military delegation to Russia, his report on the Russian army state served as basis for Beneš’s assessment during Soviet-German war. Westerners supposed Germans would repeat Blitzkrieg like in Poland or in the West, and Soviet army couldn’t stand it. Beneš was the only one who said it’s different. Husárek came back as legionary and as one of few legionaries officers went to Paris military university and later he became leading division general. After war, on pension already, he started to be interested in Chinese. He was my student and studied as full-time student at the age of sixty. Thereafter he translated some Chinese textbook, I don’t know by heart. Those who started with sinology at the end of forties, did it as their hobby. They did not suppose to subsist on it, but they liked it. The only chance to get job in sinology was the faculty until the end of fifties, 1951-1952 it was Oriental Institute, too, which was integrated into the Academy of sciences, which just had established. Průšek went to Academy after death of professor Lesný, who
was the director of Oriental Institute, Průšek was director of Far East Chair until 1953. It was a joust for employee position! Academy’s and faculty’s number of job positions was limited, in the fifties faculty employees were regarded as local employees, together with street sweepers and so. It means there was fighting for getting job. At the sixties it was much better. There were annually three or four new students after 1949, only in 1952 there were twelve of new students – these graduated in the second half of fifties. The number of professionals reached its peak in the sixties, there was around one hundred orientalists here. Oriental Institute itself cca fifty sixty of them. There were three sections, Near East, India, Far East. The number of sinologists was around fifteen. Among the elder Průšek, Krebsová, and me. Younger generation: well, names are not that important, Fass, Pokora, Švarný, Štovíčková, Šejnohová, Dvorská, Heřmanová, Ryšavá, Černá, Šolcová, Rotterová, Rusková. About fifteen and five more other workers. At university there was Král, after Průšek left, Kalvodová, and who came back from China – Střeleček, Vochala, and that’s all. In Náprstko museum there were Richterová and later Černá, who was in OI as well. Another institution is International Politics and Economics Institute with Janouš, and in Bratislava there were Čílik and Doležalová. Around twenty together. It was mostly the youngest generation, graduated in the half of the fifties and it was practically impossible to get the job in the field. As I said, when it became obvious, that people are not ready and it takes some time, the positions were occupied by other people and there was no alternative.

*How could they do the job without qualification?*

I don’t know. Take Ministry of foreign affairs, which I knew relatively well. Chinese specialized to one country, let’s refer to ministry as well as Czech Press Agency, their training consisted in long term stay in the country. Yang Xiexin, for instance, was the member of the first group of Chinese who came here in early fifties, I looked after them... Yang Xiexin worked on embassy for 26 years, and so did his wife. Or the writer, perhaps you’ve seen the book Jingxian de Bulage, she was in Xinhua for fourteen years, and many of them, put aside present ambassador, spent a long time here. We did it in a different way: three years in one country, three years at headquarters, and then you were sent somewhere else. Specialists on certain country didn’t exist. I worked on embassy over four years, no one else... Well, later I got one of the 1956 graduates from Prague, that’s right, and he worked in cultural section, but it was exception, otherwise nobody spoke Chinese, if you don’t take the pidgin-chinese communication in account. You maybe know the terms... How money were called – junák, kuahoj. We learned beautiful words, čapíše, cha bi xie. Our employee looked in the box and said to Chinese staff: bedna zou le nádraží [box zou le train station].

As far as the opportunity to talk to Chinese, it was practically impossible at that time. I myself invited, that already after 1947 there was Chinese representative in International Students League, who came from People’s China, so we were in contact, I took him even to Zlín, where I gave lectures for two years. After 1949 many of Chinese, who lived for instance in the USA, claimed their selves to be citizens of People’s China and they flew to China through Prague. Chinese embassy was in Prague not before 1951, so they applied to Moscow for making out their passports to lidová čína. One of them, his name I forgot, was waiting one entire year. I used to meet him every day and talk with him, he helped me a lot. When I consulted my translations with him, Pajemony, Sangang heshang, the Nord-east atmosphere, Shaanxi province, he knew absolutely none of the terms. This was totally unfamiliar language to them. Later Chinese students emerged here, the first group XXXX, and others were
arriving, and our students could talk to them. Present chairman of Chinese academy of sciences is student from Prague, too!

**Nahrávka??**

Spoken language after the textbook, what was on call, it means Průšek’s textbook. Beginners courses were not led by Průšek himself, I did it or Danuška Šťovíčková, and Průšek taught reading. He demanded regular homework, students had to strictly... By exams it wasn’t necessary to analyse their knowledge deeply, since the lecturer saw their qualities, they had to be prepared, lessons did not take place in some large hall, but in cabinet and so. Another lectures were historical, we devoted special attention to the newest history, which means 19th and 20th centuries. I’m skipping: do you know the volume *China Handbuch*? It is a huge collection, China from the Opium Wars until the end of Second World War. Many of us have contributed, I wrote many entries, Průšek wrote too, it was published in the seventies. I think it is one of the books I gave to the university. Průšek gave lectures on history and literature, I did history, too, and Průšek went ahead with classical Chinese quite early. Zhuanzi for instance, was read in the second grade. Fontein told me he read it in the second class, too – in Netherlands.

When establishing sinology, was Průšek free, was it a work of his own?

For the whole time I did not see anyone to interfere with sinology or any other orientalists business. In the era of 60’s, which was the most fruitful, we had contacts with the entire European sinology, we were the first to make friendship with France. In 1960 there was the Orientalist Congress in Moscow, and here we’ve met our French colleagues, who I knew, Gernet, Lucien, those I knew from China. This applies also to Malmquist, the close friend of mine, he was engaged in culture on the Swedish embassy. We arranged friendship with French sinologists. This was the first case of friendship over the Iron Curtain. Průšek, Pokora and me went to France on basis of that 1961 agreement, and Frenchman showed us anything you can imagine, we visited every single institution and so on. We arranged Frenchman arrive in Czechoslovakia in 1962, Elisejev, Chenau and Gernet, and this was regularly repeated. Frenchmen invited us to read separate lectures, I was invited to lecture in Paris, Nancy, Bordeaux, and we even arranged our yearly courses on École or on Sorbonna. We decided to divide the whole year into three trimesters. I was there in 1967, and for the last time in 1969 in winter. I was released for exams even in the year 1970 in June. At that time I was, as the only one from the Middle and East Europe, invited to München, where the conference of an American Council of XXX Societies took place. But they did not let me go already – nevertheless, I went there! As they say, xiang banfa. When you went to France by train, transit visa in BRD was valid for two days: withal day you entered and left the territory of BRD was not included. The München conference took four days, so I timed it as follows: I was in Paris because of the exams, so I took the express from Paris and crossed the frontier of BRD in Strasbourg at 1 a.m. – at seven in the morning I was in München. This day was not included from the visa aspect. And the way back... There was a direct express Paris-Prague, which was at eleven o’clock in Nürnberg. However, the journey from M to N needed approximately two hours and I had to spend the last day in München. I took the direct train from München to Pilsen through Furt im Walde and Domažlice, the express departed at three p.m., so I managed that and on midnight I was in Pilsen and then got to Prague.
Well, in the sixties it was possible already, ..., minimum five or six of our employees were in some western country or in Asia, when somebody said he was from Prague, he enjoyed prestige.

Interview Professor Augustin Palát,

Session IV
22\textsuperscript{nd} June 2010

Interviewer: Anna Zádrapová

At time when culture agreement was being prepared, I invited him [the Chinese language partner] to go to dinner with me and Průšek. For four years I spent one hour daily with him, every day, and we talked about Chinese customs, habits and whatever. I put together xiehouyi with him, several hundred or perhaps thousand xiehouyi with commentary, since I gave lectures about it at Sorbonna. So I have French translations. He was a private teacher of many many sinologists, who were in China in the thirties, and he did it in the fifties as the old man, too.

A. Z.: First Chinese students came in 1950?

Yes, they were five. Two of them stayed in the ministry of foreign affairs and one of them was Yang Xiexin in the Prague embassy. Later he was in Greece as diplomat and now he is retired. Those people, who started to study in 1950, were born around 1930. XXX, who was in MFA in their scientific institute, Rang something taught at Renda, the others I don’t remember. Those first students studied just the contacts, only later they started to study technical and natural sciences. Maybe few hundreds of Chinese students.

A. Z.: In the fifties already?

Yes. As I mentioned last time, the chairman of Chinese Academy of sciences was our student. They could associate with our students and our students appraised the valuable opportunity to speak Chinese. From different point of view: they got into the clutches of professor Švarný, who poured something into their mouths in order to make phonetic experiments on them... Yang Xiexin told me once: in China we don’t harass horses as Švarný harassed us. It was always a problem with professor Švarný: as soon as he learnt that some delegation arrived, he immediately run into the hotel and did his best to elicit them to go with him. Really his work deserves respect, it is outstanding. The number of experiments he made was thousand times higher than usually. It’s funny, he is three years older than me, but he was my student. He started to study university last semester before Germans closed it, and I think he started with classical philology. During Second World War he could not study, after war he did English and Russian and taught at high schools in Brno. During the fifties he begun to concern himself about Chinese phonetics and commuted to Prague to attend the courses – he attended our lectures. He tried to get the part time job in here. By pure accident a provincial school inspector was my high school teacher, so I visited him and Švarný got the job. Thereafter he contracted out of the teaching load at high school and came to us. Professor Průšek procured some scholarship for him – he lived in the Institute and so on... Průšek always insisted that the scholarship...
must go to Mrs. Švarná, because as soon as Švarný got money he bought books and said: they [family] have potatoes – and potatoes are healthy. He was very dedicated, very dedicated.

A. Z.: He said professor Průšek forbid him to wear the full beard...

Well, the full beard was well-known, and even if foreign colleagues distorted his name, they always knew he is the one with the full beard. He was the only one here. We celebrated his ninety and eighty nine years in Tábor. Mrs. Rusková is the chairman of Chinese union in Czech Republic and she took us, Mr. and Mrs. Švarný and me, to Tábor, where her friend runs Chinese restaurant, which is very good according to her. So we celebrated there this year and last year.

...

A. Z.: Tell me, whether and how sinology changed in the sixties and where you see the continuity?

Well, I would say the following: continuity was automatic. The change consisted in the fact that we had Chinese language partners here in the sixties. Students from China were coming back; we had a respectable library here – Lu Xuns library, such things as dictionaries and textbooks were at disposal. Therefore our work was easier. Contacts with western sinology were very important. In the fifties the contacts were practically zero, there were some contacts with the Soviet Union and Poland – but even this was limited, either. Our workers went abroad in the sixties and foreign colleagues from Western and Eastern Europe came to visit us. As a result our people could get the information how they work there, they joined the congresses. The Association of young sinologists was established after Second World War – until the beginning of the sixties Průšek went there, but many of us travelled abroad after the turn in the sixties. In 1963 Torino, 1964 Bordeaux, 1965 Leeds, England, 1966 Elsinor, Denmark, 1967 Bochum BRD and 1968 it should take place in Prague. 1969 Senigalia, thereafter I had no chance to follow it. The whole event was quite cheap, one week stay, accommodation, food, congress fees and one day trip for ten dollars. We stayed in the hall of residence and so was the catering, so it was no problem. Our employees had service passports and exit permit was not required for the countries of “people’s democracies”. Having the invitation one had no problem to go west. So were visas. And as I talked about the American congress in 1967, I went to the American embassy at that time and the visa were issued immediately. So this was the substantial change in the relations. Besides all this Chinese were here, students and teachers, our people went abroad. Foreign sinologists came not only to visit us, but either to avail of research fellowship. For instance Mrs. Slupská, Lechowska, joined research fellowship and finally she married Zbigniew Slupski. Or Carlotti, the student of professor Lancetti, came here, too.

These contacts were used later, when we couldn’t publish here. Our friends took our manuscripts with them and we published abroad. This was the case of my “Středověk” [Middle Age China] published in Italy – Mrs. Carlotti transported it.

A. Z.: This I wanted to ask, OK, now I know...

Many of us wrote something for China Handbuch, you may know this book. Mrs. Steiger transported it, ready to parade it as her work, but it was never necessary.

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A. Z.: With Průšek's Dictionary of Asian Literatures was it like this as well?

I don't think so. When was it published?

A. Z.: I thought it was in the seventies...

The Czech edition was published in the sixties, so it was available and it could be translated. I do not master written Italian – so I wrote the book in English and my colleagues translated it to Italian. It was not a problem, this was done all the time. And when we sent our work to the DDR, we could do it by standard ways, as well as to the Soviet Union – reviews and all. Even in the eighties they were coming from the west...

A. Z.: Let me recapitulate: the changes in the sixties were caused by the general liberation and contacts with the West, and the equipment of the libraries and so on played role, too...

When one joined the congress, one had chance to acquaint oneself with people, hear the papers, and when one presented it himself, there were immediate reactions. It happened to me several times, I gave paper and someone came to invite me. Books were on call, people were older. In the fifties there were a few individuals, in the first half of the fifties it was in the beginning. In the sixties they had experience, ten years and more.

A. Z.: I'm interested in one more thing. There is a term Prague school of sinology. How would you describe its specifics?

I believe it lied in the emphasis given on the significance of research and even existence of modern Chinese literature. Because there were isolated people interested in the literature of the twenties and thirties, some were interested in Xinqing nian, understandably... But they did not study the authors, Mao Dun was unknown, Lao She was unknown, and so on, Ding Ling was unknown, Ba Jin. Only later, after the Wall was built, we had all the things, which could not come to Europe. We translated, we published, Průšek started to lecture in the fifties, he published that History of Chinese Literature... So the link was made: modern Chinese literature is studied in Prague. No one was engaged in it from other colleagues. They did the classical literature, the story-tellers literature study was scarce, there was nothing... The first translation of Shuihuzhuan was Darrs in France. He was a sinologist working at Seneres, XXXX. I associated with him regularly, he was the first to translate the complete work – it is at the faculty now. He mentions my name in the preface, since I provided him all the Chinese materials I had... And spoken Chinese and story-teller genres were not studied.

Modern literature even less. Prague was marked as the place where modern literature and story-tellers are studied. Even later only few people did it – they were more or less Průšek students, who begun to concern about modern Chinese literature, when German translation of Literatura osvobozené Číny [Literature of deliberated China] appeared. In OI there was Lu Xuns library, which was popular partly because of the modern literature, partly because of the magazines and fanzhi. The collection of fanzhi that is in Lu Xuns library is really good.

How did you experience or reflect the fact that some of the fields of study were supported during the fifties, archaeology, sinology, and some subjects oppressed?
This is questionable. As I said, until 1949 the support was negative. “We have to build five-year plan or two-year plan and China is not interesting for us.” As I said, only Svit, Baťa, started to prepare themselves from the year 1948. Already before PRC was established I went to give lectures there. Otherwise it changed according to political situation. Until Bandung we were in contradictions with Arabian countries, especially with Egypt. Soviet Union, and our country consequently too, supported any Israel movement aimed against Arabian influence. So it was not recommended to study Arabic and minimum went in for it. And Hebrew was supported, because Israel was in vogue. When someone wanted to study Arabic, had no chance. After five years student finished his studies and Bandung came: everyone found out Arabs were friends and Israel was disclosed as the horrible capitalist. They said to the Hebrew students: if only you studied Arabic studies! And it was similar with archaeology. I can’t say some of the fields were supported permanently, it was rather question of fashion. After 1949 there was one young man who came to the entrance examination and self-confidently told us he would be our ambassador in China... I don’t know the situation as it was in the second half of the fifties, but students coming to entrance examinations in the first half of the fifties were enthusiasts and they did not expect to feed themselves with Chinese. They considered it to be their hobby. As I said, there were three or four new students every year with the exception of 1952. Perhaps it was a result of the first government delegation to China, lead by Kopecký (I interpreted for him), moreover the educational agreement was adopted; perhaps it was the response to the AAE trip to China..., twelve students registered in 1952, which was exceptional. But again, there was no effort to get some posts, it was rather concern...

How could you appraise the Czech-Chinese relations – I know we are talking about it all the time, but I’m interested in some concrete experience from your diplomatic work, or possibly if you participated in some political or economical talks...

Well, I did not take part in political talks, because the job description of cultural branch did not include those events. Just in a few cases I had to interpret to some potentate. Not just once happened... just between us two, ambassador Jegor was reasonable and told me in those cases: “don’t you dare to interpret what they really say. You know what to tell, but what they say, is no worth saying”. The contacts were dictated by fact that people’s democracies immediately claimed diplomatic relations with China. Although interesting is that when peoples armies captured Nanjing and Jiangkaishen went to Kanton in 1949, Soviet embassy came to him as the only one, all the other distanced. More: at time of Potsdam conference in 1945, Stalin said about Mao Zedong that he is just some unimpressive agrarian reformer. All the time in Yan’an there were minimum contacts with Soviet Union. Mao Zedong marked the Soviet directions for ground works against German as primitive. If they were used in China, said he, they would crash. When Soviet-Chinese agreement was in a process of preparation in 1949, Mao Zedong came in December to Moscow and the agreement was signed in February. All the time Mao Zedong was in Moscow and argued with Stalin. Stalin lived on the ground floor, Mao Zedong lived on the first floor and they didn’t talk to each other. Sinologists who were there told me this. It was very lucrative for China to participate in economical agreements and agreements on the cooperation. The deliveries from our side, the machinery, were all very important, as well as the work of our experts. Do you know how the experts called themselves? Čuanďák. They did a great piece of work there. I saw Zhou Enlai’s conflict once. I knew him very well, because as Stalin died, Zhou Enlai went to Moscow for funeral. After one week Gottwald died, Zhou Enlai went to Prague. I was his companion, all the time I did not leave him, I took part in all his
meetings. Zhou Enlai was a very vigorous person, I remember we planned a trip to south Bohemia the morning before the funeral. In last moment somebody came from ministry of foreign affairs with a message: Zhou Enlai should go to the airport to welcome Bierut. Zhou Enlai got angry and said he wouldn’t go. He sent his ambassador there and required a meeting with the minister of foreign affairs. The minister was designated as the prime minister and Mrs. Sekaninová stood in for him. So we found her and Zhou Enlai categorically told her, he absolutely forbade anyone to tell him what to do and where to go. He said he had nothing against Bierut, but that nobody asked him to come to the airport one day before when Cedenbal came from Mongolia. He knows better Cedenbal than Bierut, so why should he go to welcome Bierut. And he didn’t go. Sekaninová just stuttered. So I knew him and when receptions took place we always exchanged few words. Once he was surrounded by many people and he said “Jieke-siluofake bangzhu Zhongguo”, and I replied “bu tongyi, bu shi bangzhu, shi huxiang bangzhu – women shi xiaodi, Zhongguo pengyoumen shi laoge, xiaodi xiang laoge xuexi”. He started laughing and I think this was an answer to the question. It was clear they welcomed our help, our delivery. Our experts came to China and Chinese experts came to Czechoslovakia. It was really welcome and I think this feeling lasted until the chilling during One hundred Flowers movement. But it was quite short episode, fandui youpai followed and everything changed, and when Culture revolution started, things changed essentially. Moreover Chinese liked private contacts, liked people able to speak Chinese, and we know about the jieshao aspect’s importance in China, recommendations and so on. Chinese welcomed the cooperation with Czechoslovakia, because it was beneficial to them rather to us. Of course they provided many things, textile and tea and so on, but we provided for them the significant things they needed.

Well, recapitulation: you only got on to economical political things several times as the interpreter...

The culture department was quite separate. With the other I had nothing in common, with the exception of some unscheduled interpreting, when ambassador came... They had interpreter of their own, and at the embassy there were Chinese working as the interpreters, but when it came to some potentate, they expected one to emerge as the diplomat. I did not like it, I wasn’t very happy to do this, but I had a title wenhua canzang... When people from south China came and I had to introduce myself as wenhua canzang, they used to write it down as chanzhan, factory boss.

Chinese embassy in Prague was installed in 1951. Did you scientists, teachers and students come into contact with it?

I experienced contacts with Guomindang already. In 1945-1946 there was a Guomindang embassy here and we were invited to various actions af Guomindang – but one could count it with the fingers of one hand. Embassy was somewhere, I don’t know what was the place called, near the former Majakovského street, behind Villa Lanna, there was Guomindang embassy. The ambassador lived in Podolí, he invited us to his residence in Podolí sometimes. And from 1951 we were asked regularly to some movie parties, to national holiday. The embassy occurred in Lobkowicz palace, then near Majakovského, now Pelléova – originally number 21, sided against the Lanna. Besides the official receptions and movie parties I was invited privately. The cultural attaché invited me for a dinner usually.

It means the contacts were vivid.
Yes, sure.

And we talked about Chinese who came here, in the thirties there was a student to whom you helped...

Sun Dajin...

And then systematically from the fifties all the students...

Sun Dajin, as I told you, more or less prepared the textbook or the texts, which we used at the end of forties and in the beginning of the fifties as continuation of the Průšeks textbook.

What were the sources for public knowledge about China? When you were talking about your situation, you recalled My sister China and Mathesius. What was the role of newscast, literature? And then, how did scientists from the fifties participated in public education?

As I said, it was sometimes burden for the workers, they had no time to go in their research or lectures fully, but they informed public. Of course, there were articles at the newspapers, and they wrote about China frequently. However, the translations or for example memories and this kind of stuff were very funny. Even Hoffmeister, whom I generally liked, published book after he came back from China—he went there with the cultural delegation in 1953 for the first time. The book was titled Wandering around China and he writes there among others: "As we had passed Hangzhou we saw first elephants". And it’s Hoffmeister we are talking about here! But there were other delegations, too. After one week in China people wrote “informed” books about China. Otherwise we tried to provide information in lectures all over the country – there were different people in different cities that got crazy about Orient and organized discussions with lectures about it. I did it too – sure one hundred lectures in different cities. We visited soldiers, too. Usually I spent one week in the border area and I gave lecture two or three times a day. Sometimes it was silly, because the soldiers passed thru daylong hard training and when they came up for the lecture, they fell asleep. For many times the obligatory lectures was opened with the removal of the tipsy noisy miners. But in the end, there was still concern: lectures connected with various exhibitions. Many travelling exhibitions were organized and we usually had to open them. Both Czech and Slovakia. New Orient acted as propagation, too. It was under-counter-business at some time! If one needed to corrupt somebody, he could give him one volume of the New Orient. And there were New Orient Bimonthly and international AO. NO was very popular here. I think this was our – sinologists’ – contribution to enlightening the public. Another contribution consisted in numerous translations. The modern literature was translated. I did Ding Ling Sangang he shang at that time, Wan Sijian, Bai Moni. Of course older things were translated, too: Shuihu zhuang, Xiyouji, poetry. As far as non-fictional literature is concerned, this was translated as well, for instance the Chinese articles about economy or ženská otázka, this all contributed somehow to the overall knowledge. And Chinese movies! Of course some of them were terribly naive. We translated subtitles. I don’t remember any more what movie was it exactly, but definitely there was nothing impressive on the scene with the soldier coming back to the village he left before the Long March. He is coming back in 1945 to greet his wife and says after while: I have to go now, and she answers: Jiu shi weiliao gongzuo... Yes, some of the movies were terribly naive for us, but for Chinese... The ensembles were popular, too, the Chinese military ensemble came in here in 1954 and travelled all around the country, Czech, Moravia,
Slovakia, colleague Černá and five more sinologists accompanied them. They came in August, I just caught them – in September I went to China, but I caught them and I think I interpreted the opening ceremony at the indoor stadium. And our people were interested in Chinese artistic groups, in Chinese acrobats. And of course, our lectures at the faculties of education were attended by many students of the different subjects, so we saw concern there, too. In a word, propagation burden, translations, exhibitions, lecture cycles, this was disproportionately heavier in comparison with the west. Nobody did things like this there. I really cannot imagine someone from Sorbonna or Oxford...

You said they lectured twelve hours annually...

At Collége de France, yes. And topic they chose by themselves. And they had the opportunity to do research and so on.

How did you choose your academic interests? Was it completely your choice, or did you have the feeling it should be done?

I was interested in the Song and Yuan times, because it was the first time China came into contact with Europe. Naturally Chinese merchants got to Zakavkazi via Silk Road, and silk was partially the reason why západořímská empire fell. Silk was delivered from China, and because Roman ladies and girls yearned to have it, it had to be bought. Or later, Arabian ships controlled the trade with China, Africa and Near East, but living Europeans got to China only in Song era for the first time. This attracted me most, as well as the situation, when Song dynasty came into power after Tang dynasty, and found itself displayed to the northern pressure. Liao, Jin and later Mongols got to China and the conflict between nomads and peasants begun. Chinese were peasants and always had conflicts with nomads. Nomads blamed Chinese for changing grasslands meant to feed their herds into fields, and Chinese blamed them because of their small fields... When you treat the problem meteorologically, it was a question of 150 millimetres of rainfall. Bellow 150 millimetres rainfall the possibility of farming is excluded. Areas with such a small amount of rainfall have no agriculture, that’s why Chinese during sinization progressed from the lower Yangzi to the south, only minimum to the north. And just seldom they got to the Mongol areas. I was interested in these conflicts. And when it comes to literature, I was interested in Song literature as well as Song painting. Of course I occupied myself with what French call histoire de XXX, not so much political history, but rather history of everyday life. I’m convinced that potentates alternate, but people stay.

So you chose the topic of your interest according to your free will. And the students in the fifties? Could they choose the topic of their degree work by their interest?

As far as Průšek was concerned, it was free choice. Průšek never forced students to do anything. Of course students were influenced by Průšeks literary specialisation – but he wrote papers devoted to the Chinese conflicts with non-chinese structures... By the way, in 1969 or 1970 Průšek had troubles with his publication China and Northern Barbarians: he was suspected that the northern barbarians in the title were Soviets... It was very embarrassing for him to explain that his book treats of time little bit older that Soviet Union. So, Průšek had clout on students, but did not tell them what to do.

It was different in other degree courses: acceptable degree works topics were given and students were expected to choose one. This is an interesting difference.
Průšek respected everyone’s interests: you are interested in this or that, try it, do it. But he never commanded what one should work on. Of course there were some collective topics, but even in those cases he did not order anything.

Tell me more about your work in the OI, how was it organized, how the tasks were distributed?

Generally said, Průšek fought for covering the areas that were not yet covered, this was the starting point. The faculty, which was a centre in the first republic and few years after Second World War, worked with a limitations to Arabian world, Iranian world, the ancient Near East, Egyptology, India. For instance South East Asia – Burma, Thailand, Indonesia were not covered, as well as soviet part of Asia – Turkistan, Tajikistan and so on, Afghanistan was out of interest, Kavkaz, Africa at all. Průšek tried to broaden the area and he did it by several ways: wrote it out at the faculty or during entrance exams – there was always someone who started the field of study... But Průšek took the opinion that everyone should choose what he wants, he never told anyone to do literature or history.

And what did you do in the OI?

Partly I was burdened with my own work, partly... Průšek had much to do in the international institutions from the beginning of the sixties. He was deputy director or general secretary in CIPSCH, FILLM, UAI... And besides that he should manage the Academy. I don’t know how the Academy is organised now, but it was divided in eight sections, and the different sections took care of running the departments. Průšek was a chairman of the eighth section Language and literature. So Czech literature, Czech language, Russian literature, international literature, many institutions fell into it. So he was very very busy abroad as well as here. And more or less I did the substantial amount of work in the OI. Institute was managed by Institute council, whose meetings took place once in a month. In the council there were chairmen of departments or two or three people from every department, and the organisation things were discussed. Another organ was scientific council with its quarterly meetings, in which purely scientific questions were discussed. As far as sinology is concerned, the sinologists held the meetings weekly on Wednesday afternoons – and not only sinologists of the Institute joined it, but those from faculty and other workplaces as well. We shared reports on relevant activities, on each other’s work, reviews on what’s new in sinology, about new books and so on. We did this continuously. I can say we applied what Chinese used to say: qiti lingdao, geren fuzuo – collective leadership, individual responsibility. It means each single department reported on its activity, but no one ever decided what those departments should do. If someone did, it was the department director, and he usually respected the individuals. We mostly organised it like this: I came to the Institute in the morning and Průšek came in the afternoon, in case he was in Prague. In the afternoon I was at home and worked, I dealt with the usual problems in the Institute... The scope of duties was very tiring, there were always problems – but one had to reckon with it. When Průšek started the department at the faculty, there were always many organisation things to do. Even later, when having pomocné vědecké síly, he had to do many things by himself – the library catalogues and so. Well, we worked in the field conditions, but it was an interesting job – of course it was different from what I should see later in the West, but...
They loved a pilaf in Tajikistan. The way how to prepare pilaf is following: above the jar with rice and the pieces of lamb they hanged a sheep-tail, and the oil dripped from the tail. It had to be a pretty thick one. They thus bred some special thick-tailed kind of sheep. Chruscow, who poked to anything and called them Kuruznik, ordered them to breed some other kind of sheep with the softer wool, but with the smaller tails. So a frightful fight started between Tajik and Chruscow for the tails. Gafurov stood by Tajiks. He was a very interesting person. When he visited Tajikistan: RUSKY. We were in touch with Dreyer, the director of the Oriental Publishing house. Both, Deljusin and Dreyer, were interesting persons. Deljusin is a French name, his grandgrandfather came to Moscow with the Napoleon army, he was captured, got married and his grandgrandson was Deljusin. Later Deljusin became the director of the Dalněvastočnoj institut, and then he managed Biblioteka obščestvěnných nauk on the Academy of Sciences. He is still alive, we correspond. He introduced me to all those people: Bulat Okudjava, Rostropovich, Maximoff, Ljubimoff, the whole group, Kusačan.

Well, you drunk with Okudjava, who can say this!

Yes... I have some of his records from the time he was not popular at all. His father was shot in 1937, I knew his mother, who was Armenian, she spent seventeen years in jail... Deyer’s father was shot in 1937, too. Different people, yes. I enumerated almost all of the European contacts we had. Some of them are still alive: Pulleyblanc – he is the Canadian and lives in Vancouver. Hoax died, van der Loon died, Gernet is still alive, he was my closest friend. As I came to France for some shorter time, I lived in his house. I liked him the most. I have all his publications, some of them dedicated, I gave it all to Olomouc finally, they’ve put it in the separate section in the library. Of course Alleton is alive, she was in Paris, in XXXX. Bastide is alive, she was in Prague several times. I’ve known her for a long time, she was a vicerector at École Normale Superiore, now she is independent. In France there was Stein, Tibetanist, he was a German Jew and as I probably said, he got to France in the thirties, afterwards he escaped to Vietnam and when Japanese came, he hide in the village and in appreciation of this he married the girl. He lived with her and on pension they moved to Medon, which is Paris suburbs on southwest, not very far from Versailles. And the observatory is there, where Štefánik worked. I might forget someone, Malmquist and Bilnstein from Sweden, and Egerot from Denmark... We had no contacts with Romanian and Bulgarian sinologists, I knew none. Later there was Saye in Slovenia. I was opponent by his higher doctorate in 1994. In this year I suffered stroke and doctors did not allow me to go to Slovenia – it was very hot June, university could not postpone it, because it should start functioning in autumn. So they solved it. The examination hall was ozvučena, the Lublin radio contacted the Prague radio and I went to Vinohradská, I got the headphones, microphone in a cabin and I took part – I read my opinion and took part in the discussion, it was allowed to use English.

A pak o schůzkách nejstarších sinologů, co se konají dodnes...