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O. L.: *When did your concern in China start, where did you encounter something Chinese?*

Well, China was a last thing to me. When I was a seven-eight years old boy, I started to read the Bible. We were a poor family, we couldn’t afford to buy books, especially in the years 1939-1940. My grandfather bought a large illustrated edition of Bible and it became a second spelling book of me. We had a small library at the village, I chose anything with a mythical or partly historical touch, and I was particularly interested in Africa. It was my first love, I used to read Livingston, especially Congo and adjacent areas were my thing. I read the papers of professor Šebesta, who was a Czech ethnologist, he was a missionary by verbists (The Missionaries of the God’s Word), he got the education in Austria. I was also interested in Pygmy peoples. As far as the more secular literature is concerned, I got Robinson Crusoe first. I read Albert Schweitzer. I had a dream to go to Africa and to cure the leprosy there. Those were the most important authors for me, however I read more of them of course. But after the year 1948 anything changed. It was impossible to go to Africa, it was even impossible to study related subject at the Charles University in Prague at that time. But as I was interested in the foreign languages, my friend told me to go to Prague – he became a famous Slovak archaeologist specialized in the Slavonic archaeology. He gave me the lecture schedule, and I said I could try that. Besides this, I had a colleague at the high school, Jiří Lexa, who was professors Lexa grandson, and he talked to me, too. I was very surprised professor Průšek was a tall and very nice man, I expected him to be old and when I had heard of him. I listened to Průšek’s lectures on the Song dynasty, and those devoted to the Mongolian invasion. I was enthusiastic about his lessons at the first place. Docent Palát told me, there is no sinology in Slovakia, there is even no sinologist, and you know what happened in China and that China is important, you could study Chinese. I said it was all the same for me: if you think I could do it... professor Král tested my English – it was rather good at that time, so there was no problem for me to pass the exam well. From the start I knew I wanted to become a pedagogue or a scientist. I lived at the 5th May college – doctor Pokora and mister Slupski were there, too. Slupski was one year older. We made friends together. At the beginning I studied the historical books mostly, but at the fourth year I caught tuberculosis and I had to spend half a year at Vysoké Tatry. I had no other choice but to choose some easier subject, so I started to study literature.

O. L.: *When did you come to the university?*


O. L.: *Professor Král taught here already?*

Professor Král didn’t teach us at that time, but he was a “pomocná vědecká síla”. When he was a first or second year student, he gave lectures in classical Chinese literature. He wasn’t used to it and we went only through Shijing in on semester, so we would need fifteen years for it.
O. L.: Could you name some other teachers?

Mrs. Hrdličková taught us the old Chinese, when she went to China with her husband, Mrs Šejnohová replaced her, but she did it when I was in the sanatorium in Vysoké Tatry, so I didn’t experience her. She tested me at the end. I think we all loved Mrs Kalvodová, since she used to spoil us. She used to dictate vocabulary to the youngest girls, who were the most lazy. I didn’t need it, I was able search the dictionary by myself. Her lessons were the easiest. Professor Průšek gave us lectures no longer then two semesters, once we had a seminar with him on the ancient history, but all he told us was we should find the information in the books. Well, it was a great advice at that time, since it was so difficult to find the sinological literature at all. There were two or three relevant publications on Chinese history, which was very few for all the students. So we thought out a method how to write our own teaching materials: each of us had to deal with a certain era in Chinese history. Everyone did it, only Mrs Ryšává didn’t. She used our work, but she didn’t give anything back. It sounds like gossip, but it’s really true.

O. L.: Průšek didn’t teach literature?

He only taught history, and actually he didn’t lecture, he gave us homework. Actually it was a seminar, I remember I was talking about the Song dynasty, Průšek came and asked me where did I take it. The materials were so few that he could recognize the sources quite easily. Průšek lead one more lesson, the degree work seminar. In 1957, before we finished, we talked about what we were writing. The person, who proposed us the topics, was Mrs Hrdličková. I remember one thing which is quite typical for Průšek. I told him I would work on Mao Duns short stories. He reacted in front of my classmates: the modern Chinese short story is worth nothing except of Lu Xuns short stories. After two years he worked on it – on the basis of my paper. The papers of Mrs Doležalová and Mrs Kalvodová convinced him that the modern short story could be the interesting thing to do and he raised it on the pedestal. That was Průšek.

O. L.: You talked about the study materials. Could you tell us more about it’s character?

We had no Soviet books, at least not until the end of our study. Writing our own materials we used no soviet stuff. One of us did, however, certain Milan, who was a ADK person (the student of Courses for Workers) and didn’t know anything but a little Russian. He worked on the Zhou dynasty, but his entry was useless anyway. He wasn’t only ADK student, besides that he was stupid, too. We had Maspero, La Chine Antigue, the second was the French author, who wrote about the central Asia, and the third was Fitzgerald – he was the most popular one. At the times Průšek tested Zlata Černá, he had a plenty of time. He called the students together to his flat on Nerudova Street. He told us to sit down and make ourselves comfortable, asked us what we wanted to drink, tea of coffee of a glass of wine? He used to drink red wine always, his wife was very angry with him since he went slightly fat, at least later. At the time I’m talking about he was slim, a beautiful tall man. Well, he posed questions then, the questions repeated all the time – four or five questions for all the students. Průšek asked Mrs Černá something about the ancient history, she started to talk, and he knew immediately which of the books she studied. He let her talk, she was coming to the end of her knowledge and slowed down. By the way, the exam lasted more than two hours often, I heard Palát’s exam lasted half a day or even more. After Zlata finished, he told her where she learned it. This was typical. Průšek was a director of the OI at the time I came to his exam, so the questions
were quite short then. The next question was the archaeological one, everyone had to describe a cup, a very thin cup. The students knew it, so they were ready. There was one more question, the queen-mothers, the significant women of China. I got the question about the end of the Han era, Han dynasty up to the Sui dynasty – and this was the topic I wrote for our improvised teaching material (docent Palát called it concoctions), I worked hard on it and it was really thorough. He listened to me and finally he said: you are talking about all the details… he said, give me your “index”, he gave me the best mark and sent me away. So we had three publications to study Chinese history. But there were much more books than those presented by professor Průšek – I found out when I was working on my Zeyer paper. But those three were the most popular.

O. L.: Although you weren’t one of those China-fans from the youngest childhood, could you recall the character of the information published about China? What were they like, how many? How was the China image made?

I don’t know what was the situation here, but I can tell you the situation was very bad in Slovakia. The popular articles written by the catholic missionaries were the only to inform people about China. There is a problem with the missionaries, they came to China just to spread their religion and mostly they felt no special affiliation to China. The missionaries came to evangelize and Chinese were only pagans to them. I remember one picture I saw in my eleven: the picture represented the opium smokers. The picture was so terrible I can see it even know in my head. I read various things in the books: Chinese are stingy and arrogant, they offer something and they expect you to refuse it. So my image of China wasn’t very nice at all. I can recall Tiananmen very well, how old was I in the 1949. It was very interesting for me, it was quite a different change! However, I had a catholic education, Mao Zedong was not my idol, but when I got the chance to study Chinese and when I saw the perspective is good in this subject, I took it.

O. L.: Tell us something about your China stay, how did you get there, what were your impressions?

Well, you are very curious!

O. L.: It’s not us!

I tell you. Six or seven of us graduated, not everyone finished in time, some of the girls did it in September only. I was looking for the job already, since I was told at the ministry of culture that there were no more places in China. but during the summer vacation I got a message I should depart to China for one year. Before I left I went to Prague to check some materials and contact some people. Professor Průšek gave me jieshaoxin addressed to Mao Dun. I think I came to China the same day Camus died, professor Pipmaneu was a first person I met in China and he told me this. When I pulled my jieshaoxin out of my pocket at the liuxuesheng bangongshi, they connected with the ministry of culture and one month later I met Mao Dun. I gave him the selection of my degree work – about Mao Duns short stories. He read it through and he said that much: I agree with some of yyou statements or what you wrote about me, but you do not know the Chinese situation as it was at that time. Later he told me: you know what, go to my birth place and have a look, you’ll see that the background is somehow different from what you imagine. So I did it, I went to Wu Zheng and I was the first foreign sinologist to go there. I’m not sure whether someone of those three men who devoted to his work besides his relatives went there – two of his relatives were literary theoreticians.
I got my PhD father, professor Wu Zexiang, he was a nice man who knew Mao Dun personally, knew the literary context of the thirties well, but on the other hand he was no Mao Dun expert, so he couldn’t tell me much about what I needed. So I met him only twice, I listened to his lecture. I used to go to the library, I travelled, and I was buying two sorts of books: those about Mao Dun and those about Yu Dafu. Mrs Doležalová would never write her book without me. How I did it? It was simple. I learned the guanxi were important. When Mao Dun told me I should meet Mister Yue Yiqin there at one jump, who was then a chairman of Shanghai Chinese Writers Union. This man gave me jieshaoxin to the largest Jiao Shudian Menshubu. I went there and they let me go anywhere, they opened the door for me and I didn’t need to search the normal shop shelves. They showed me the small rooms, and anything was there! If only I was richer, I could have bought more, but I couldn’t have known what was coming... I could have the best library! And I bought only 59 books, which are not so many, I could have bought five hundred most important publications. I went back to Beijing afterwards. 

When I go the offer to go for holiday, I refused, I had to write a paper for the publication Studies in Chinese literature, Průšek asked me to do it. But the book was edited here and I don’t know if it was the Czech chauvinism or what, but all the Czech papers which were sent there were published, and from the Slovak originals none appeared in the book. In fact I’m glad my paper wasn’t published, since it was a very elementary one, all I wrote was something about the sujets and nothing more. Moreover professor Průšek wrote a letter to me. I didn’t talk about it anywhere and I don’t want to talk about it at all, but Průšek wrote: comrade Gálik, we cannot afford to criticize Mao Dun now, and so forth, it’s not time to do this. I thought, oh my God, I should only speak highly of Mao Dun, I can’t tell anything about his failings, well, I was glad the paper wasn’t published. I have the manuscript still, but it would be too much to present it. As far as the foreign students are concerned, the times were very hard. I came in 1958, the 15th of September, and at the beginning of October we started our lessons. All the foreign students of literature at Beijing University were gathered in one group, forty or more students from all over the world – and we got the lessons as total beginners. I knew anything of it long time ago... well, I listened to professor Wang Yao, but as soon as the young Yan Jiayan came, who was younger than me and worked hard for the revolution for several years, I asked myself, why should I go there? I know more than him, I’m coming from the Prague School of sinology! I didn’t go there any longer and of course I was criticised from the liuxuesheng bangongshi. They sent a critical letter to our embassy and they told me: Listen, Gálik, we send you home, we buy a ticket for you! I said: I know what I am doing, you know what the situation is like in here, I won’t attend the classes which give me nothing, I will go to the libraries, I will go to the second hand bookshops, every Wednesday I went to Wangfujing, where the amount of old books was largest. Dongfang Shichang was the best, Renmin shichang was fine, too, but not that much. They remembered me in the Dongfang shichang already and they were surprised I didn’t go outside to have something for lunch. I carried something with me, but at the 1955 (!!!?) I didn’t want to go outside, where the hungry people at Dongfang shichang waited for the opening hours and when they got some food, they shouted, zai lai, zai lai, since they wanted more. I had always something with me and they were surprised someone can ignore food at times like that. Once professor Průšek needed a certain book and he couldn’t get anywhere. One of the people who was sorry for me gave it to me. If I asked Mao Dun, he would certainly help me, but I was the young guy with small experience.

O. L.: Průšek wrote the jieshaoxin in Chinese?
I don’t think Průšek wrote it by himself, someone translated it for him I suppose, but of course finally it was in Chinese.

O. L.: Can you remember your classmates? Czech or foreign classmates, it doesn’t matter...

Well, I can tell you something, but those things should not be talked about... none of the people giving the interviews talked about it. The first students came in 1951, the second batch came in 1952. There were twelve or fourteen altogether. Before I came to China, Kratochvíl was there, Kolmaš came. Mrs Černá came at one go with me, but she was sent back home after three weeks. Marta Ryšavá came as well, but only for a while, since she was waiting for the first chance to get to the Academy of Sciences, where people got the scholarship which was three or four times higher than we got. She succeeded at the end. I was the last from the so called sinologists to come to China, all the others were actually back at that time. Brotánek was there still with his wife, I think he married her, Tajik was she, Milka Porubcová from Slovakia was there. Those two studied history I suppose. So I was alone there, I left in 15th June 1960, one day before the sand storm occurred, which I experienced just at this singular occasion. I invited all of my friends, professor Pimpaneau came, professor Voskresenskij, Elvira Stulová, who was a friend of Mr Strouhal for some time, and few more people. My room was crowded at this parting occasion. I had no troubles with my luggage, still I transported half a van of books. Professor Viktor Petrov, who helped me the most, left before me. He devoted himself to the modern Chinese literature, he wrote a book about Lu Xun, and he had an exquisite library. All Chinese he knew presented him their books in the first, second, third etc. editions. His library is now exhibited in the municipal library in Sankt Petersburg. He told me: don’t listen to Mao Dun, don’t listen to anyone, work by your own way, get the material wherever you can. He was right, the times went harder afterwards. I don’t know how it was with professor Slupski, who left China three months after me. He told me once, that while studying materials at the Beijing tushuguan, today Guojia tushuguan, he had a soldier standing behind back with a gun. Thank you very much, it’s nice to study under such circumstances. I had good chances, perhaps thanks to Mao Dun, I could get wherever I wanted.

O. L.: Did you attend the courses together with Chinese students?

Not at all. No one single Chinese student. All of my colleagues were foreign students, from the beginners to CSc.

O. L.: Did you have some immediate communication with Chinese students?

We got one or two Chinese assigned, they were called fudao. They were expected to help us. I had two fudao, one of them for the whole stay, his name was Hu Shuangbao. I don’t remember the name of the second one, but he had to work on the four-volume history of Chinese literature, which was ordered by the constitutional committee. The book is dedicated “qinai de dang he weida de zuguo”. So the second fudao didn’t come later, besides this he devoted himself to the ancient Chinese philosophy, Taoism, Laozi, Zhuangzi. And the contact with the other Chinese was very difficult, they were watched very attentively. If I happened to be seen by someone with Chinese girl three or four times, she was sent to laodong gaizi somewhere and I was warned. If you would make friends with Chinese or south-Slavonic girls, we buy you a return ticket. The only one who could come to us was Zhou Zunan, he ate everything up and completed it with the desert. We called him Hurvajs, since he
looked like Hurvíněk. His Czech is excellent and he studied at the diplomatic school Zhou Enlai established. People used to say about Zhou Zunan that he was a denouncer. Anyway, when Hu Xiangbao came to me, he was first interested in what I bought, since he hadn’t seen such books in his life... I don’t know if he had to talk about what I had. But he was very useful to me, really.

O. L.: Of course you lived together with foreign students...

I thought you knew everything! We lived at the place where the chair of philosophy is. The chair of aesthetics is in my former bedroom at Siyuan. Wuyuan are the oldest buildings, formerly they belonged to the Harvard Yanjing Institute, which was the university where people like Bing Xin or Zheng Zhenduo gave lectures. The Russians were living at the Wuyuan, besides professor Petrov Serebryakhow lived there. Did I mention my roommate? Brotánek. I had no chance to come to places where Chinese students lived. They were six or eight in one room and their toilettes were ugly and dirty, ours were clean...

O. L.: Tell us about your strongest impression from China.

When I was at the aircraft above Beijing, there were corn and sorghum fields all around, quite a difference from today’s state, and after I entered the university, I was surprised nothing was prepared although they were informed of our arrival. Jaroslav Pravda came to me, he was a diplomat and drunk a lot. It killed him: he was drunk and fell into the shaft. But he was a nice man. As I came to him, he asked me: are you Gálik? We are expecting you. I said it was me... I was surprised by the tiny airport. The only lonely bell boy was there who was sitting somewhere in the corner behind, I saw two three buildings and it was all. I didn’t get anything to eat the first day, well, I had some snack later. But when I walked out from the university gate, there was nothing but an open space. Today the area between Beijing University and Qinghua University is all built-up. The only thing I could see there where the small Chinese’s naked posteriors. I was also surprised by their buggies. The weather was nice at that time, but later I found out they are naked in winter, too, I couldn’t understand it. The second impression is connected with the information I got from professor Pimpaneau: Camus was dead. The next day I went to liuxuesheng bangongshi, the leader of the office took me in – poor one, she was terribly persecuted during the time of the Cultural Revolution, although her name was acceptable for the communists, too. i was impressed by one gentleman later, who was an incredibly tall and thin man. His job was to organize the trips. Later he became the director of the Beijing Daxue Chubanshe. He helped me to publish my first book, The Milestones, in China. It was published quite soon, one year and a half after I passed the book to the publishers. I saw the man two times more in my life: in 1987 at the second congress of Chinese Comparative Literature. And one year before at the parliament building I saw one man who was similar to him, only much fatter was he. So I said: woshi Gaoyike, and he told me, listen, Gaoyike, you are the best student of the Beijing Daxue, you published two books in Chinese, we’ve never heard something like that.

O. L.: After you came back to Czechoslovakia, how did you get the academic job? How would you describe the conditions or the academic work? Tell us about your opinion on the progress of our sinology. Maybe you would prefer to talk about the Slovak sinology... we hold you for the originator of Slovak sinology...
Well, there should be two of us to share the post, since Mrs Doležalová’s merit is much larger! One needs guanxi to establish some institute, not so much as in China, but still. Mrs Doležalová was a woman who liked to smoke and meet people, her way to scholarship lead through the writers and Tatran. Tartan was a publishers house which devoted itself primarily to the older literature. Slovenský spisovatel, on the other hand, was aimed at the modern-day literature. She knew everyone. With another colleague of mine, professor Gabriel Altman, who by the way was a professor at the Bochum University until the recent years, they organized the establishment of the Orientalistics Chair in March 1960. This happened before I came back from China. only two workers were there, and as far as my position was concerned, well, they thought I would go to the army for one year and a half. Well, I wasn’t that stupid. I knew about the possibility of the alternative service. And since there were many Gáliks on the Slovak-Moravian border, and one of them was a general. They believed he was my relative, and I got the chance for the shorter service. And after I returned, I didn’t find a job. I had a girlfriend, which I wanted to marry. Of course she was crying, I have been waiting two years for you, I went through hell with my mom, who told me, don’t be silly, he won’t marry you, well, you could marry me finally! But I told her I had no job, and she answered, you’ll find something, don’t be afraid and wait a moment. This happened in 1960. I survived on the so called “translation activity” for some time, for which I got five hundred crowns a month. I came to Prague later. You probably know about the Průšek’s Wednesdays. Průšek reserved the time after Wednesday’s lunch and his students were coming. They all worked at the Institute, although some of the people from the faculty came too. and we discussed or read something. When I was attending the seminar, we read Liwazhuan. Průšek always used Vy (a polite way of vocative in Czech) when he was talking to students, but as soon as the student graduated and such became more close to Průšek, Průšek started to use ones Christian name. So he said to me: Marián, how is your job situation? I said, I had no job. He asked me: why didn’t you tell me anything? I didn’t know you can get a job for me! I was informed I could get employed in one year and a half! Still, I can write the jieshaoxin to the director of the Academy. And he did. The following month, the 1st of November, I got the job. Průšek interviewed me of course, I told him what I did in China. We used to correspond when I was there, since he wanted to maintain informed about the Chinese situation, and he wasn’t there since 1959. I told him I was working on Mao Dun. He said I couldn’t do it. You must start with the literary thought, with his articles on the literature. There are two papers from professor Gruner from the Humboldt University. I said, Oh my God, I have no material for it and anything... What am I gonna do? Průšek told me: you have your head on your neck, think of something. I wish you to do this. Fortunately, I was always a letter-man and I maintained contact with various places all around Europe as well as America. As such I got quite a sufficient amount of material and I was able write a respectable study finally. The study was published abroad, Mao Dun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism. The mathematical linguistics was popular among Slovak linguists at that time, and as I tended to rebel a bit and as I loved Zhuangzi, I decided to do it. Professor altman, the friend of mine, was an important figure here, and the most important was Mr Doležel, who agreed we could go ahead with the mathematical linguistics. So I begun to make notes. But I had to consult it with the director, who sent me to doctor Holotík, who was responsible for history and literature. This man told me, I will talk to Průšek about it. And průšek said: no! Gálik will do what I told him to do. Mister Holotík came home and told me about Průšeks decision. You will do what Průšek said, otherwise we have to part. God, I had one child already with my wife and I didn’t know what to do, if they fire me? Well, I had enough material, so I turned to Mao Dun and with his help I got some other stuff. As I defended my paper, he was surprised
someone could gather so much material in Bratislava. Well, I gathered it somewhere else. I was never afraid to write letters, that’s it. I was lucky enough not to have problems through it.

O. L.: That’s the question I have to ask. How was this working? How did you establish the contact with foreign academicians and how did it happen that you published your paper abroad?

This is a good question. Well, I had many contacts abroad. My first contact was a very young lady who was called Bonnie McDougall. She was nine years younger than me and we never talked together. I had a girlfriend and Bonnie was an eighteen, nineteen years old crazy girl with a short skirts, I wasn’t interested at all. But as soon as she graduated and came to the university at Sydney, I saw she was a very interesting woman who knows very much and has plenty of excellent material. She had a great professor, too, so we started corresponding, but I saw her not before another ten years passed.

O. L.: You saw her in China for a first time?

Yes, she was my classmate first and later we ate together in the foreign students refectory, which was at the place of today’s Shaoyuan Hotel, so it was not far away. She kind of reproached me at the occasion of my seventieth birthday, she said Gálik was always very serious and didn’t notice teenagers. My daughter liked it very much, she was happy that her father never eyed girls up. But I always knew Bonnie worked on topics which were close to my work. She analysed the foreign literary thought impact on China, but she did it in other way, more generally I can say, she was younger than me and nine years means much in science. One may work hard as hell, but when someone older works hard, too, he must do more in nine years, that’s clear. Well, she was one of my foreign contacts who provided me materials. Later she went to Harvard from Sydney. Harvard was fine, I got some literature from Harvard, from Bloomington, but especially from Harvard, namely professor Lui Wuji. He was a son of mister Liu Yazi, who used to exchange the poems with Mao Zedong. With Lui Wuji, we had a correspondence for about twenty five years. Yan Sen was another provider: he worked at the library in Copenhagen. I got some literature from the Soviet Union, too, Semanov had great stuff, Riftin and Sorokin as well. We used to correspond and sometimes exchange things. Those were the most important people. Later I had contact with Kowalis. After professor Zgusta went to America, Kowalis met his son and thus became the other contact. So, I wasn’t afraid to write letters. I was meeting people at the occasion of young sinologists’ conferences. I got many materials from professor Krammers, who suffered stroke at the age of eighty and couldn’t use the books any longer. Later when I paid a visit to him I got some materials concerning Bible. Bible had some impact on the Chinese culture, since the people who came after Lu Xun, and generally people living at the beginning of the 20th century, they all were the pupils of the missionary schools. Of course, those institutions had to teach Bible. Thus the students were taken by some of the biblical stories and used to write about them.

O. L.: What do you think of the so called Prague School of Sinology? And interrelated question: what does the word sinology mean to you? What are the purposes of the discipline? Is sinology identical with guoxue?

I never devote myself to these questions, but one of the conferences in 2007 did. It took place at Renmin Daxue and although I had a lecture there, too, I was talking about the works of Zeyer and the
first contacts of Czech and Chinese literatures. But I listened to other people’s reviews. I think there exists a difference. Guoxue is a native people’s discipline, hanxue is foreigners’ discipline. We necessarily present the different points of view of some things. I had a chance to follow this problem during my work on Bible and modern Chinese literature in last twenty years. They can’t understand it that much, they can’t understand Bible as European, Jewish or those who define themselves Christians. The background is different on both sides. I say, I don’t know if it is true. But I believe that non European japanologist or sinologist can’t write the study about Buddhism better than some our sinologist or japanologist. Our background is deeper, our literature is better and so on, so I say our opinions must differ a lot. I got a letter from Shanghai in recent days, and the editor of my new book about Bible, which should be published this year. And he wrote, your book is profound, it is more profound than the publications we have got here. Professor Helmut Schmidt Grünzer talked about what his opinions about the subject of sinology at the conference in 2007, and he pointed at the problem of historiography while considering the character of sinology. The European historiographer would think about let’s say Sima Qian in a quite different manner than the Chinese one. Those problems are connected with the question of true. What is true in history? Other criterion were more important in historiography until enlightenment, the sacral matter were of greater significance than the secular matter. That is the problem. Professor Yu Dayin met me during the congress in 1986. She leafed through my publication Milestones, where I compared Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Guo Moruo and some others with the European literature, and after five minutes she said: this we must translate! She told me Chinese couldn’t figure those problems out, since they didn’t know our literature that well. So I think the division has some reasons. I don’t know any paper dealing with this question in its entirety – it would demand a long time as well as the material from many various areas. But there is a great difference springing from everybody individually and from the different ideological, political and social background...

O. L.: And the Prague School?

I wrote the whole paper about it. Last time I was asked by certain Korean professor to write something about Lu Xun in Czechoslovakia. Slovakia was quite simple, I listed what Mrs Doležalová did, but I think she took the Czech text as a basis, comparing the both translations I see the word order correspondences, so I can’t believe it. Otherwise there is a problem of Průšek and Krebsová, Doleželová wrote about Lu Xun of course, she wrote one of the most excellent studies about Lu Xuns Medicine. A beautiful study. Mrs Kalvodová wrote about Shi Xi, too. But there is a problem with Průšek and Krebsová. They were enthusiasts, they did everything according to the contemporary demands, Průšek changed his coat according to the political situation... he was quite different before 1963 and after this date. First he stressed the political and the ideological aspect everywhere, and after Camus and Sartre came to Prague, he changed and started to show regard for the artificial aspects, too. in both cases he was quite inaccurate, still more in the second case I think, especially when it comes to the modern literature. I don’t believe much too what he was telling about Lu Xuns modernity, moreover the term modernity is actually very amorphous and one can use it for anything. I devoted Průšek the most space of course. Kresbová followed him. I think Kresbová is hidden under all translations subscribed by Průšek in fact. I have the article somewhere. And as far as the Prague School is concerned, I do not know if school is the right term for it. Each school has its own theory, each one different from the others. Russian formalist school, Prague Linguistic Circle, that is something I deeply respect. Průšek had no theory. I talked so many times to him... I came to him
after we got the topics and I asked him: professor, which of the theories should I study? At that time he already... he was the most dogmatic before he wrote the work about the liberated areas, which is a crap. Well, in case one reads it very carefully, very attentively, and doesn’t notice the author’s enthusiasm... Průšek knew three poems of Mao Zedong and wrote he was the best Chinese poet. What can one think then! He writes about Chinese people standing in front of the Mao Zedong’s portrait – yange arises which is just about worshipping Mao Zedong. Průšek considers this as good literature. Dreadful! I know people who met him, for example one of the Slovak professors who knew Průšek only from this side, and he said, Průšek, he is such an asshole. Wise man, this professor, but he didn’t experience Průšek in his better aspect. Průšek used to express himself like that certainly until 1961. He had to hold the politics of the communist party. But he surprised me in 1965, we were in Liblice, where Průšek invited all sinologists from the whole Czechoslovakia, people from Warsaw came, too. At this time he said: well, for me, the liberation is a pretty suspicious matter, I don’t believe it too much. When Průšek was abroad, he used to drink coffee or wine somewhere. Before this other thing occurred in 1963... Some Mrs Kalousková, who was as old as him, and me – for the moment I was the closest person for him as far as literature is concerned, since Kalvodová and those people weren’t there. But there were many Czech people, and he took me to the opera house for a drink and he said something like this: communists are much worse than Nazis, because Nazis killed a man, but after that they left him, while communists wouldn’t let one be even after his death. I was truly surprised, I didn’t tell anything, but I put it down into one of my articles. This event took place in Bordeaux in front of the Opera. He was speaking about what he needed there, otherwise he used to confess to Berta Krebsová – he never confessed to his wives when it came to it, but to Berta. This kind information is not related to sinology, it is rather Průšek’s psychological portrait. Well, the Prague School of Sinology isn’t the real school actually. The reasons why it is called that way are several: Průšek was like Confucius, he had no as many as 75 followers, he had 20 or 25 of them. One could come whenever to consult, he used to work at home in the morning. After lunch one could come and present his problem. Docent Palát let the visitor in and the discussion could start. Even the private matters came up. As far as the Průšek’s Wednesdays is concerned, I regarded it as very useful. We were like a large family all together with Průšek as a patriarch and with us as his children, not yet grandchildren, since he married late... and Průšek’s era wasn’t that long actually, after 1968 everything was over. Průšek was not a dictator as Leo Oufan Lee believes. It isn’t true. As soon as the agreement was achieved, it was valid thereafter and Průšek didn’t affect it usually. Berta Krebsová was different in this aspect. She protected her pets, which were few by the way, very much. She always needed to hear students’ confessions. When I came to Prague once and I happened not to visit her, she reproached me for it. Mrs Krebsová was well educated in the ancient Chinese and European philosophy, but she didn’t know much about modern literature. One had to ignore many notices in her papers. During my defence on 16th May 1960, by the way the woman wrote Dazibao in Beijing this day and the Cultural Revolution started at the Beijing University, we didn’t know the day was so important. We were sitting in Prague at the Oriental Institute and Krebsová was one of the opponents of my CSc. paper. She started to point out my mistakes and while listening to her speech I found out she confused Liang Shiqiu and Liang Qichao. Průšek only smiled and said nothing. After we finished, she came to me and said: Marian, you shouldn’t have twaddle like that! I answered it was my defence exam and my work was to defence myself. I didn’t tell her she confused two such important figures... but what I appreciate about Průšek is his ability to get so much money. What I really do not appreciate, although I can understand, that he made friends with Kopecký and similar
vermin at that time and even later, too. He should accept the money, say thank you and leave. Of course Průšek could fawn on those people to get the money, but I heard he kowtowed to Nejedlý – Mr Fass told me Nejedlý was sitting and Průšek just kowtowed. I would never do that. So this is what I reproach him little bit. But without Průšek Czech sinology would be something totally different, that I know for sure.

O. L.: Well, the Wednesday sessions took place every week?

Yes. Maybe from time to time... sometimes he had some other meeting. The Wednesday sessions were the analogue of professor’s Alexejev Leningrad readings. Průšek was extremely accurate in the vocabulary preparation. As we read Pu Songling, Průšek wrote an article for Karlgren and he had to deal with Pu Songlings life affairs. Therefore he read his poetry, which was terrible! Mr Pu Songling’s poetry is little bit different from his wonderful short stories... He writes, my house is full of rats, my leg hurts, and such things, oh my God, imagine you must read it! Průšek was very straight, he used to find every single word, I was really tired of it. But professor is allowed to do such things, he had to work on his article and kind of utilized the occasion.

O. L.: Well, is there something you want to add?

If we talk about the Prague school of sinology, we should mention the East German sinology besides the Czech and Slovak sinology, because the cooperation between those people and Průšek existed. Klaus Kaden just a bit, since he was a linguist, but professor Gruner was an important figure. He wrote about Mao Dun and the cooperation was very lively there, as far as they could meet. Thanks to professor Gruner Průšek knew about the first Lu Xuns articles, which were written by wenyan. And later published in Tokyo in some magazine. Professor Gruner told me Průšek was very interested and borrowed the translation, which he never returned. Some other lady worked on Lu Xun with Mrs Krebsová. The Czech and the East German sinologist understand each other quite well. The Central Committee of the Slovak communist party made a good job for the Slovak sinology, too. The son-in-law of Bilak lead us, the idiot, but he told us: do whatever you want, but write nothing against the regime. They weren’t interested at all in what we were doing. Our papers were published in English, which was incomprehensible for those above. I wrote things about Nietzsche and China, which read by an good Marxist would be very dangerous for me. However, nobody read it! We didn’t have to go through the twenty years of working on the stupid jobs like translating Renmin Ribao, that lucky we were in Slovakia.

O. L.: And what about your students in Bratislava. Are they followers of the Prague School?

It depends. I acknowledge the Prague school so far it is connected with Průšek. If Prague school is existing today, it is different. Lomová is different from Průšek.

O. L.: I don’t feel like the direct follower. The continuity was broken, although my candidate paper was lead by professor Doležalová... I would be the part of Bratislava School (laugh)...

The Bratislava School exists even less than Prague school, probably it doesn’t exist at all and I’m the first to object to such a term. I have my own literary theory, connected with the social perspective and at the same time taking the structural aspect into account. I described it briefly in my book The Genesis. Except of that I am the follower of the Slovak comparative school. As I cooperated with
Průšek until the year 1972, I count for his followers, too. As far as my students are concerned, I’m not sure about their knowledge about Průšek. You should ask them. If Benická knows something about Průšek, I don’t know. I closed my paper about the Prague School by the year 2000. I would continue, but I was forced to finish it quickly in order to publish it. Prague school has some merits, but it shouldn’t be glorified so much. In fact, it should undergo the critical revaluation now. It was a great thing in the seventies, in the eighties.

I want to say something to the C. T. Hsia affair. It shouldn’t be started with at all. Průšek made a mistake to start it. C. T. Hsia couldn’t do anything else as to defend himself. The whole thing was totally unnecessary, and each of them is at fault little bit. As C. T. Hsia didn’t like the communists, for him everything they did was bad. Průšek and C. T. Hsia both have their merits, although each of them in other way. Průšek used to change, he was kind of chameleon. In 1952, as he wrote his worst paper, which became a document, not a monument, he was someone else as in the years after 1957... the second persecution of the Czech and Slovak intellectuals came in 1958... Průšek was happy as the Studies in Modern Chinese Literature were published – it was terribly celebrated and at the same year C. T. Hsia published his book. It was like a slap. Průšek said we were the best in the world, and at the same time we weren’t able to publish one respectable book. C. T. Hsia wrote the whole book himself and quite in a different manner. And Průšek attacked him, which was bad. Criticizing someone, one has to be very very careful. Průšek didn’t respect it, but later he figured it out. C. T. Hsia proved himself as better in something: at the beginning of his article he wrote Průšek was an educated nice man. C. T. Hsia wrote a letter to me, in which he expressed Průšek shouldn’t have done it. And he was right.

So the Slovak situation was better than the Czech situation in some aspect. You had many materials here, but many obstacles, too. People had to work on things here which are good for nothing. After 1972 Průšek was forbidden to enter the Oriental Institute. He came to hear my lecture in 1972, after I came back from the young sinologists conference, and he asked me: how old are you, Marian? I answered I was born in 1933. He told me: well, you are still youngster, then. He lived several years after that, still full of life, but disappointed beyond measure by the situation. I met him at Kampa in 1975. He used to come here to read something, since he worked as the redactor of Orientalische Literatur Zeitung.