Průšek is the creator of Prague School of Sinology, I am his follower and the member of the subsequent generation of his students. Among the first students were Krebsová, Palát, Kalvodová, Šejnohová...

O. L.: Kalousková, Hrdličková...

And Bartůšek went to some Průšek's lessons... And it was all. I'm the member of the third or fourth generation of his students. Pokora as well as Král preceded me. I can't remember all of them. Besides those people there was the older generation of people who studied in China: Fass, Vochala, Novotná. Dvorská was just a year younger than me... Spěvák, Střeleček, the philosopher. People, who studied in China and didn't do sinology later, worked at various ministries. These are...

O. L.: The practical experts...

I would call them the China-specialists. So I am not the founder, Průšek was a founder, Průšek indeed was an exceptional person. He was like this even before, in the thirties, when he travelled to China. He had the distinctive opinions at that time. Here he belonged to the left intelligence, and as he went to China, his worldview was all done. Read My Sister China, the man speaking there is a man who knows what he wants, where he is heading and what the future would bring to him. After Second World War, and especially after The February Průšek understood, that the chance came to establish the sinology here, and he used the occasion – he took up with the growing political party. Thanks to this he could establish the sinology.

O. L.: Talking to some of your colleagues, we were surprised by their statements – they told us Průšek was not a good sinologist. And when talking about the teaching, we recorded some opinions downplaying the work of the days... as far as teaching materials are concerned, teaching methods, too... Could you comment on this little bit? What materials you used, how were you taught? Where lies the Průšek's singularity after all?

He definitely was an extraordinary person. It is hard to judge the quality of his founding act, since there was nothing to start from: there were no books, no other materials, no money, no nothing. So Průšek started from scratch. Thanks to the fact Průšek was a significant political figure in the academic world, he enforced many various things – the library, money for the employees, so the sinology could begin somehow. What was the teaching standard? Well, of course it wasn't good from nowadays point of view, but how could it maintain some standards, when there were no basic reference books? Matthews dictionary was the only one for the entire Chair, the owners of dictionaries were very few. We started with the Kolokolov Chinese-Russian Dictionary, Oshanin followed. I got Matthews not before the fifties, since I had the aunt in Canada – I asked her and she sent it to me. As far as the other books are concerned, one of the most requested books was Fitzgerald, the culture or the history of China, quite a nice book, but the scientific level corresponded to the time it was published. And again, we had one copy for the entire chair, which was somehow borrowed or what, so we had some excerpt, I don't even know who prepared it. Maybe Velingerová was engaged in it somehow. It was written by the typewriter and we learned the Chinese history.
from it. I understood German well, so I could study the Eberhard’s history of China. German language was unpopular at that time, so I could get the book.

_O. L._: _Do you remember your teachers? And how did the courses look like?_

Danuška Šťovíčková, Dana Kalvodová taught me, Dr Kalousková and Palát, Průšek, too, but just for a short time. I attended his lectures on the history of China, which were great. Before Průšek fell ill, I attended his lectures for one year. After that he didn’t return to it, which I regretted, because the lectures were great.

_O. L._: _What was so good about them?_

The personal enthusiasm. The history seemed to be experienced by Průšek himself. He had the ability to attract the students to the problems of Chinese history and how the problems were solved. So it wasn’t the chronological enumeration, but rather the problem approach to the subject.

_O. L._: _The lectures were more about cultural, political or economical history?_

Political history. I listened to his Song lectures, Průšek was talking about the mechanisms which caused the dynasty fall. One of the lessons was devoted to the defeatist policy of the court.

_O. L._: _Průšek held the belligerent attitude?_

He thought they should fight. This was the opinion of a considerable part of Chinese society at that time. I remember Průšek describing the temple in Hangzhou built for yuefei. He told us about the statue of Qing Hui, the traitor. He told us Chinese went to spit on the statue. I asked present students if they went to the temple and see the statue, but they told me it wasn’t there, they didn’t notice it. So maybe the statue was removed.

_O. L._: _Did Průšek quote the Chinese scholars?_

Yes, yes, several names, he mentioned Gu Jiegang, the founder of modern Chinese historiography, who was active in the twenties and thirties, he liked to cite Zheng Zhenduo...

_O. L._: _And how about Hu Shi?_

Yes, he cited him. He used to defend him. Chinese didn’t like Hu Shi at that time, since he walked away from the communists, but Průšek quoted Hu Shi and quite with respect I must say... At least I do not remember any critical comments.

_O. L._: _Was there any connection, sympathy or critical attitude towards the Soviet authors?_

This is a very difficult question. I would have to think it over. He knew many European sinologists personally, and he cited them, he lectured in America, too, but I do not remember any concrete name.

_O. L._: _The other lectures were somehow interesting for you?_

Except of Průšek’s lectures there were none. Of course we had the ideological lectures, Marxism, the history of DKPV, the history of the communist party... well, now I recalled my feelings from observing
the nowadays political life: watching the politicians behaviour and words, I must say I see the analogy with the communists behaviour at the end of the twenties, when Stalin ordered the bolshevikization of the communist party. This meant a certain attitude, and such an attitude we can see by some of the politicians today as well. The absolute ruthlessness, the absolute arrogance towards the democratic system, the populism, the lies and the way of the political fight, which consists in saying the worst things one can say about his political opponents... What disgusts me the most is the custom taken over from the Bolsheviks in my opinion: some politician wants to do some filth, and thus he accuses his opponents of doing it. It reminds me of the Soviet Union. When fighting for a peace they built bigger and bigger army and armed. This remained by the people, it is the permanent phenomena, and people take it, people buy it.

O. L.: Well, let’s go back. Talking about Prague School of sinology, we usually emphasize the significance of the modern Chinese literature research and Průšek’s contribution here. How did this Průšek’s work affect his lectures?

We didn’t have lessons in modern Chinese literature at all. The only thing I remember is that we read some texts, Lu Xun above all and perhaps something else. Průšek’s preoccupation with the modern Chinese literature originated from two sources. First, he was aware of the limits put on the human sciences in the fifties. He knew there were certain areas people couldn’t do an objective research or to do anything. But he wanted to lead the people to such a subject, which was connected with the real life. He chose the modern Chinese literature, since it referred to the present time and it was not entirely subordinated to politics. Except of those facts Průšek knew many protagonists of modern Chinese culture personally and wanted to do something for them. Those were two incentives of his interest in modern Chinese literature. He didn’t teach it, nobody taught it in fact, since we had no literature lectures at all. We had to acquaint with the books individually according to the conditions of that time. Průšek stresses the translation, so translations were many. Průšek himself translated Lu Xun and encouraged people to translate the modern literature, modern poetry, later he wrote the book about the liberated areas, which was very much appreciated in the political circles, but not so popular in the academic circles. It was translated into German in DDR, but sinologists didn’t like it much.

O. L.: Do you find something interesting on that book?

Well, in some special way, yes.

O. L.: I do find quite many interesting there, but I’d like to hear how you would call it.

Well, I don’t know, I’ve read the book of course, but I can’t say I was delighted with it. I didn’t read it again, and I would have to read it once more to say something about it.

O. L.: So the study and the research itself was the matter of the candidate level?

No, no, it was rather the level of the magisterial papers.

O. L.: And the topic of the research was given to you?
No, everyone chose it. Of course the topics had to be discussed with the supervisor... although I do not remember I had some supervisor. I simply wrote it and Berta Krebsová got it for review and it was all.

O. L.: What was your magister paper about?
Lao She, too.

O. L.: Why did you choose him?
Well, the reasons were purely... not selfish, but I was rather lazy. Some of Lao She´ s books were translated to Polish at that time, and this made my access to his work quite easy. You know, Lao She wrote many books and it’s quite arduous to read it in Chinese. The fact that some of his novels existed in translation was thus very relevant.

O. L.: Students were fairly free by choosing their topics. Did the situation occurred, that student chose a topic later talked off by Průšek because of the political reasons? Did students take the political factors in account?
No, I don’t think so.

O. L.: In time I was studying this was a substantial problem.
You know, we were politically conscious so to say, we were perfectly aware of the limits, they were obvious for us.

O. L.: Průšek knew many left intellectuals of China, who fell into disfavour during the fifties and had problems in China. Did Průšek reflect this somehow? You mentioned Hu Shi and told us about the fact Průšek referred to him, although Hu Shi was condemned at that time in PRC. Were there other cases?
I don’t remember any other case in concrete. But I can remember the following kind of situation: in case someone opened a delicate topic or tried to ask delicate questions, Průšek talked it out of him. Not by some pressure methods, but he said, well, go away from this, you can’t discover anything, you can’t even write it... you know, like this. One couldn’t work on some topics, it was self-evident. But take this: in case you want to work on something, you want to do it properly. If the topic existed, which was impossible to treat properly, one opted out of it. Eidlin of USSR came often during the sixties. Once he asked me: how would you in Prague react to the order from the higher places, which would tell you how exactly to write on a certain subject? He was confused by my answer, I told him I wouldn’t do it even if I were asked to. I saw he balked, and I saw this answer was unpleasant to him.

O. L.: I ask those questions from my personal interest, too. In times we were studying, we had clear instructions what to write about, we were pushed into certain topics and those topics were given to each of us. Moreover the interpretation of the problem was kind of prearranged. The exclusiveness of the soviet literature was emphasized and the discipline was actually the most political one at the faculty of arts. That’s why I’m interested...

Well, the difference is fundamental, this didn’t come into play at all. We never experienced the assignment of topics or so. Definitely not in Průšek’s times.
O. L.: Do you think sinology was different from the other disciplines?

Hard to say. I think the situation has changed in the sixties, the freedom grew and one could write very independently. Of course, the dangerous areas still existed, but we sinologists didn’t perceive such a pressure.

O. L.: Did the Soviet-Chinese rupture influence the general information about China here? When Zlata Černá arranged the publication of my book, our negotiations with the relevant department of the Central Committee were very delicate. The department approved all edition plans. The publication of Chinese book was a four-year matter, since the instruction was clear: no positive informing about China at all. The humorous book from the nineteen century was thus a problem, since it could arouse positive attitude towards China.

But you are talking about the seventies here. In the sixties nothing like this appeared. There had to be some directions concerning the Chinese literature as well as the informing about China, but we didn’t feel them. The situation of the sixties was very special, you know. The political pressure existed towards the negative informing about China, but on the other hand, the sinologists’ attitude towards Chinese events was negative, too. Our political postures agreed with the postures of the political forces. But even so, nobody wanted to write negative things about China, although everybody knew there is nothing positive to say about Chinese revolution... people held back, they didn’t want to barge in it.

O. L.: I wanted to ask about the Lu Xun’s Library. You worked there, could you recapitulate what you remember?

The beginnings of the library date back to the early fifties, 1951, 1952, when Průšek went to China with the government delegation. Within the framework of the friendship between the communist countries he had the incredible opportunity to buy books. He got the money for it. And he bought many many books – which created the basis of the Czech sinology. There was a material enabling people to work. The books came to Prague and they needed to be organized in catalogues somehow and made accessible. I remember Velingerová finished school at that time, we are talking about the 1955 or so, and she was entrusted with it. She was looking for the people, for the workers, and she asked me and Pavel Kratochvíl. We started to work in the institute in 1956 and begun to work on the collection. Since we had no experience and moreover we were no librarians, professor Zgusta was sent to lead our work. He personally processed the system how to deal with the task. At was really hard. We were quite uneducated as sinologists, many of the books we weren’t able to read even, we didn’t know what it was and how to eat it... Zgusta found out the solution and it was a good solution, the catalogue exists until today and the excerpts I made are still there. Later Fass came back from China and after the political vetting of 1957 or 1958 Ryšavá, Dvorská and Boušková added on to our team as the cadre support. We dealt with the primary collection in several years and afterwards the collection needed only the routine maintenance.

O. L.: Do you know something about the selection process? Did Průšek chose the books himself, or had he some Chinese consultants? Some of the books source from the cancelled schools, some of them were eliminated from the libraries...
There were all to buy at the market... one could find whole libraries at jiushudian. Some libraries sold their books, some books were confiscated. Průšek bought the large collections firstly: sibu beiyao, Sibu congkan, Wanyou wankua, this was the basic fund. Except of those Průšek bought the specialized literature: historical, philosophical and literary, he bought modern literature and the human sciences production from the twenties and the thirties. And the forties, too. I think Chinese helped him with the selection actually: the comrades of Czechoslovakia ought to get this, because it is the fundamental thing and so on... in this way, I suppose. Chinese offered this and that, Průšek knew many people... Zheng Zhenduo, who was very fond of us, visited Prague, too. I do not remember, when he came, but at any case I think he helped to organize something.

_O. L._: Many people talk about Průšek’s idea of the generous conception of sinology at the university. He mentioned to establish all the basic disciplines forming the sinology. Dana Kalvodová told me about the theatre and so forth. Do you know about those conceptual ideas or acts of Průšek?

I never discussed this problem with him, but I know he wanted the Prague sinology to be aimed at the humanities. I talked to Palát at the Průšek centenary about what does sinology head for, and Palát told me sinology ought to continue in Průšek’s way: history, philosophy and literature – those main subjects. My personal opinion is slightly different: I would add the comparative aspect to both sinology and its teaching. People found out China was original, peculiar civilisation. But if you inform someone about the Chinese culture, you need the comparative background to make the differences obvious. People can’t discover it, people don’t care, they don’t think about it. Student should be directed to see and look for the differences.

_O. L._: Our student look for differences, but they find it where it is not, since they do not know their own tradition properly. They know China is different and discover things, which are not different at all. Well, how – according to you – the political situation of the moment influenced the Czech sinology? Now I’m not talking only about the chances to get the money, rather I try to ask you about the wider circumstances, the political as well as the cultural, which can go beyond the concrete political conditions...

It seems to me that Czech sinology’s development follows the Czech cultural tradition: poetry and arts firstly, history and philosophy in a lesser degree. In Poland, for instance, very few are interested in the Chinese literature and Chinese art as well. There is the only man able to do it on the academic level. But there are people who devote themselves to the problems of politics, ideology, economy. There is a great concern about the political development and the political institutions. I didn’t register such an interest here in Czech republic. I think the Czech sinology agrees with the general Czech tendency. Take for example the Chinese theatre... we have several individuals dealing with it, but none of them is such a personality like Dana Kalvodová – she lived with it.

_O. L._: What do you think about the term Prague school of sinology?

I hold this term for a too strong. There were a special interest, which was formed by a certain way, but I would hesitate to call it the school.

_O. L._: Your candidate paper is devoted to Lao She, tell us something about it. You picked up on your magister paper...
I was interested in the novels, how were they made, and I’m interested in those things even today. The novels of Lao She were completely different from what I read in European literature. I wanted to look at it more closely. I had some basis in my diploma paper, so I said to myself, I will go to China, look around and see what is at disposal. I had to begin from the very beginning, I found out I knew very little about the Lao She work. I had to find all books he wrote and published, he was a pretty prolific author and his work is very large. I spent a long time in the second hand bookshops, where I found many pirate editions, which I had to compare with the proper editions... it was necessary to get through it, otherwise I couldn’t be sure what I was writing about. I discovered Lao She made a lot of changes in the editions after 1949: he reduced, corrected and changed the stories... I worked at the very base of literary craft. I had to deal with the text, with the material, with the editorial problems. What did I mean to talk about at the beginning?

O. L.: Why you chose the topic and what was your candidate study like?

When I collected the whole work of Lao She, I discovered the substantial turning point in his writing – the year 1949. He was done with the novels and he started to write drama, plays, whose value wasn’t too big, since he wrote them to order. I decided to give myself some limit and henceforth I worked only on the novels written before 1949. My question remained the same: how the novel structures changed by Lao She, how did they develop.

O. L.: Did you chose the question, or Průšek helped you?

Průšek didn’t help me. I consulted it with him just very briefly, we didn’t go deep. But I told him about my ideas and it was all.

O. L.: Now I ask my last question. What were the political demands on the students at your time? As far as the humanities are concerned, the university students of my generation were hard examined during the study. The politically reliable persons enjoyed priority when it came to the selection. This is what Kubešová herself told me: don’t think you are clever, we always prefer loyal people... Did the political pressure affect the personal forming of sinology at your time?

Well, the pressure existed, there was a basic cell of the communist party, and it guarded those things.

O. L.: And this cell worked on the chair level?

Yes, and at the Institute, too. The cadre questions were discussed there: if this or that person is loyal or not, and so on. But it was possible to slide through it. One couldn’t start talking carelessly and show the disgust for the regime, and had to join the May Marching. I grew up in the atmosphere of the Hitler’s Germany from the 1940, where one had to keep attention not to speak Polish, not to say anything about the Third Reich... I was well educated, I knew how to behave, always on the side, not to talk much, not to believe people, especially the unknown people...

O. L.: How did it work politically? The partisans were employed preferentially?

Of course. After the political screenings in 1957, which influenced the society deeply, the partisans were preferred.

O. L.: Tell me more about it!
After Stalin died, the Party and the Government found themselves in a bad situation: people, who didn’t like the socialist system, started to raise the head. And those people were many. The situation was similar to Chinese events, where the baihua qifang politics was practiced and declared. Here nobody declared it, but certain kind of releasing was to feel, especially after the Hungarian events. After the liberation reached certain point, the voices of freedom seemed to become too many too often to the Party, and thus too dangerous, so the Party started offensive. A nationwide vetting begun – the workers of the ideological institutions and the leading workers had to submit to the political vetting. Since the Oriental Institute was the ideological institution, every worker here had to pass the vetting, too. The vetting commissions were established with the members selected from the Institute management as well as from the Party and from outside – the partisan instructors and so on. This commissions called people individually and asked them questions. What do you think about this and that, what is your attitude to XY, how was it possible you were in Darmstadt in 1945? Why was you there, how did it happen? Why does your aunt live in Ecuador? Do you contact her somewhere? Does she write often letters to you? And so on.

O. L.: So people were questioned individually in front of the commission members.

Individual interview, yes, protocol... The commission then recommended dismissal, observation, care for one’s political education... various recommendations like this. Someone stayed at work, someone was fired, someone had to do certain thing... well, the statewide harassment which went pretty deep. The whole action’s aim was to frighten people and to break up people’s relations... someone got fired, somebody else came to replace him, you know...

O. L.: What was Průšek’s position in this vetting?

He was a member of the commissions. He was one of the important members of the commissions. He advocated people.

O. L.: I heard this from many different places.

The well known case was Švarný case. Průšek got the order to try to make Švarný leave the church. Průšek was angry, he didn’t think he should order someone to leave the church. But I remember people talked about it at that time. Průšek defended Švarný successfully. Švarný was a man of great sincerity, who used to say openly: yes, I’m in church, I believe in God, do what you want. Normally, people didn’t act like this. If something could make me harm, I wouldn’t speak about it. If I go to church, I go to church, that’s my business. But Švarný wanted to behave straight and he admitted his faith. Well, the vetting penetrated in depth really. I knew one man, who was a watch repairs keeper, who managed two people. He had to pass vetting, too.

O. L.: So we can say it was organised to install the loyal communists into the ideological positions. People active in the commissions could settle their accounts, but at the same time, if someone like Průšek was the commissioneer, he was eventually able to keep the best people in his team.

Yes, yes, yes. He saved Gamprt, too, who was an unfortunate person... Indologist, German, he wasn’t pulled out and he worked in the library. He looked like Quasimodo, but he was an honest man, really, a good man. The fact he was a German was an aggravating fact in 1957, the anti-German tendencies were still very strong at that time. I think they planned to fire him and Průšek was the one who saved
him. Gampert was a pre-war scholar and he was a meticulous librarian. When I was at the second or third year, the scandal occurred at the faculty. One of the students at the Polisch studies declared she was a believer. It was an enormous affair. She declared her faith tells her not to disclaim the beliefs and so. The big faculty meeting was convened to condemn this girl. She was called to tell what is her attitude to religion and she told she was a believer and the storm could begin. The assistants from the chair of Marxism started to shout, this is an ideological faculty, it is improper to keep somebody like this girl here... well, I remember I was sitting behind with Kratochvíl and the thing seemed grotesque to us. She was an adult person who knew the situation. She saw where she was living, and she claimed such things... it could mean death! She was rushing headlong towards disaster... I don’t know how this case ended, but it deeply impressed me. I’m telling this rather to illustrate my posture: the posture of the small man who is aware of the danger and would never say things like that.