

Jaroslav Průšek and Czechoslovak Sinology. Between politics, Science and Fascination.

Abstract

This thesis deals with the beginnings of Czechoslovak Sinology in the context of the political and social situation during the post-War period, posing the question: what factors played a decisive role in that process? The study focuses on a few main areas: Jaroslav Průšek, the founder of Czechoslovak Sinology, as an individual actor whose personality combined an engaged approach to social affairs with intellectual honesty based on direct contact with the culture under study (especially its language and literature), and his contribution to building Sinology as a scientific discipline. Of necessity, that was explicitly tied to the contemporary political situation, which shaped scientific practice through the cooperation of all loyal actors, at the ideological as well as institutional and personal level.

Through a discourse analysis of contemporary texts, mainly by Průšek, we follow these continuities diachronically: the development of Průšek's thought on China from his student days in the 1920s, through his stay in China and Japan in the 1930s and the particular war years, until the post-War (and post-1948) period; as well as synchronically: the links to the period's mentality, created by shared values. We further analyse the specific content of contemporary views on science, mainly on its popularisation employed as a tool of propaganda for the new political regime. In the case of Sinology, as a subfield of East Asian studies, that function was mainly embodied in the *Nový Orient* (New Orient) journal. Thanks to Jaroslav Průšek's scientific qualities, the magazine maintained its level independently of the ideological models of the day, even during the harshest years of [Stalinist] terror. We also follow the connections between the period's politics and Sinology through the cultural exchanges between the two countries, where we observe a significant share of manipulation from the Chinese side, which applied its "foreign affairs" policy especially on foreigners with a friendly predisposition towards the communist regime. Interviews with contemporary witnesses then provide an image of an expert [professional] memory from which we construct social sites of memory which (albeit indirectly) reflect part of the actors' experience of the period and help shed light on their activities [actions] at that time.