

JAROSLAV PRŮŠEK: A MYTH AND REALITY AS SEEN BY HIS PUPIL

Marián GÁLIK

Institute of Oriental and African Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

This is a preliminary contribution to the study of the Prague School of Sinology, dedicated to its founder Professor Jaroslav Průšek (1906–1980), one of the greatest world Sinologists of his time, who left a deep imprint on Sinological and Oriental Studies in former Czechoslovakia and contributed much to the spirit of mutual communication and understanding between East and West in scholarly research and translation work.

I do not remember the weather of the day when Jaroslav Průšek, well-known Czech sinologist, died on April 7, 1980. In the evening of that day my colleague Professor Josef Kolmaš, well-known Czech Tibetologist and Sinologist, telephoned to me: “The old gentleman passed away.” It was not necessary to point out who this “old gentleman” was: we all knew, due to his illness, that this day would inevitably come.

But I do remember exactly the day of Průšek’s funeral on April 14. The ceremony began at 14.00, and it was wonderful day, real spring weather, the streets were full of young people enjoying the sun and pleasant atmosphere. I put aside my books, my writing concerned with Lu Xun’s essays from the years 1903–1908 and with his collection of short stories *Nahan* (Call to Arms), later published in *Asian and African Studies* (Bratislava), 21, 1985, and in the *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation, 1898–1979*, from the year 1986. The death of Průšek meant a heavy blow to me, similar to the death of my mother. Their deaths were probably the result of cerebral haemorrhage, and since I had to care myself for my mother in the days preceding her passing away, the death of my teacher had the same impact on me. A few hours before his burial I took the book *Zhuangzi* and read some passages from the chapter entitled *The Great and Venerable Teacher* (Da chong shi) in B. Watson translation: “I received life because the time had come: I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the “freeing of the bound”.

There are those who cannot free themselves, because they are bound by things. But nothing can ever win against Heaven – that’s the way it’s always been.”¹

Průšek was very fond of life. From the philosophical and ethical point of view, as a sinologist, he preferred Confucian philosophy. His philosophy of life is hard to define and it was changing during his life. When he was young, he was fond of the “romantic and original dreams of Taoism”,² as we know from his confession written in the year 1947. He changed his opinion during the World War II being a witness to the cruel, totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany ruling over Bohemia and Moravia. He was sure that the political system based on violence, hds to collapse just as was the case with the Qin Dynasty in the year 207 B.C. Průšek except being outstanding scholar, translator and teacher, was also a man of intuition and hope. He was the child of his age and in the May days of 1945, he was the man (I was told) who took into his hands the keys put aside by the SS troupes stationed in the Oriental Institute, and opened this institution to his country and to the world. He believed then in the days of Victory, that the new age of Oriental studies begins in Czechoslovakia, in the whole Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union liberated from the Nazi danger and yoke. He was sure that the Soviet Union was a commonwealth of free European and Asian (i.e. Oriental) nations with the possibility of further development. For him the abyss between Europe and the Orient, made after the Munich Agreement in 1938 and World War II, came to end on May 5, 1945, with the end of the first day of Prague Uprising and with the end of the war in Europe on May 9, also in Prague, and with the “victorious and indestructible file”³ of Slavic nations led by the Soviet Union and its invincible Red Army. This was of course his fateful error. The greatest part of the Czech intelligentsia was of this opinion. He later very much deplored his words and attitudes of the first postwar years. The word “liberation” in the sense of its later explication in the Eastern European countries, was a source of his inner pains in the time of his “great awakening” (*da jue*) (*Zhuangzi*).⁴

A few words are probably necessary concerning his *curriculum vitae*. Průšek was born in Prague on September 14, 1906. He studied at first European history at the Charles University, Prague. Later he switched to Sinology at first at B. Karlgren, Göteborg, then G. Haloun, Halle and at E. Haenisch, Leipzig. After finishing his sinological studies he tried to get to China and succeeded in receiving fellowship from Mr. Thomas Bata. This famous Czech industrialist needed to sell his shoes in the vast market of China and Průšek wanted to study

¹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Transl. by Burton WATSON. New York and London. Columbia University Press 1968, pp. 84–85.

² Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, “Úvod” (Introduction). In: *O čínském písemnictví a vzdělanosti* (On Chinese Literature and Culture). Prague 1947, p. 5.

³ Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, “Úkoly české orientalistiky v osvobozeném státě” (The Aims of Czech Oriental Studies in the Liberated Country). In: *On Chinese Literature and Culture*, p. 14.

⁴ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 47.

in Peking Chinese social history, being enthralled by the teachings of Max Weber and Werner Sombart. Between 1932 and 1936, having the possibility to meet some well-known Chinese and Japanese scholars and men of letters – both in China and Japan – like Zheng Zhenduo, Ma Lian, Guo Moruo, Bing Xin, Shen Congwen, Nagasawa Kikuya, Shionoya On and others, he put aside social history and began to study the medieval popular and modern Chinese literature. Before his return to Czechoslovakia in January 1937, he spent one semester at the University of California at Berkeley reading a course on medieval Chinese popular literature there. This was a completely new field of study for Western Sinology. After coming back to his native country on the eve of the Nazi occupation, he wrote a text-book of Mandarin Chinese for his sponsor (there was much in that book about buying and selling), and was obliged to earn money at the University Library, Prague. He also read some texts concerned with Chinese literature and philosophy with sinological zealots.

Very soon after his return to Czechoslovakia his partial translation of Lu Xun's *Call to Arms* appeared in Prague in 1937, with Lu Xun's short preface with nice words about the literature as the most noble means of the interhuman communication.⁵ Later on he worked on the translation of Confucius' *Lunyu* (The Analects)⁶ and Mao Dun's *Ziye* (Midnight),⁷ and published his travelogue entitled *Sestra moje Čína* (My Sister China) in 1940. It is a pity that this book was never translated into one of the world languages as a wonderful document and witness of the time. As a scholar he devoted much attention mainly to the medieval popular literature, and can now be regarded as a founder of this branch of study in the West. These studies published at first in *Archiv orientální* and later reprinted in the volume entitled *Chinese History and Literature* from the year 1970, made him famous in the sinological world.

At the second half of the 1940s and during the 1950s Průšek became a well-known scholar both at home and abroad. The knowledge he admired most of all, was not the ingenious knowledge of genius. Although he himself was very talented, well-versed in many branches of humanistic scholarship, especially in literature, history and philosophy, he used to say in Czech: “Učenost souvisí se slovem učiti se a uměti” (Erudition is related to the word: to learn and to know).⁸ Průšek began to devote himself to the study of modern Chinese literature more deeply in the second half of the 1950s. If we take into account this contribution, which made him probably even more famous than his work in the realms of Chinese medieval and late Qing popular literature, then it is true that much he put before the eyes of his readers or delivered at different conferences and taught at different courses, e.g. in the United States, had been at least partly

⁵ *Lu Xun quanji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun). Vol. 6, Peking 1973, p. 527.

⁶ Prague 1940.

⁷ Prague 1950, 1958.

⁸ Professor Průšek dedicated to me an offprint of his study “La nouvelle littérature chinoise”. *Archiv orientální*, 27, 1959, 1, pp. 76–95 with the sentence just quoted.

prepared by his Prague and Eastern European pupils, mostly in their M.A. theses. But it is true that it was Průšek, who caused a change in the overall sinological climate in the field of the study of modern Chinese literature by his articles in the European and American journals, and by his *Introduction to the Studies in Modern Chinese Literature*, the last being published in Berlin in 1964 but prepared for the press already in 1959–1960. In order to be fair in regard to his pupils, I have to say that when he spoke about Lu Xun there was a bit from B. Krebsová, his second wife, then from V. Semanov (Moscow) and V. Petrov (Leningrad); when Průšek spoke about Mao Dun he used the works by F. Gruner (Berlin), and after he left for America in 1967 he asked me to send him all my published and unpublished works, among others my nearly finished book *Mao Tun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism*, which appeared later in 1969. In his exposition of Yu Dafu he certainly used the secondary sources prepared by Anna Doležalová-Vlčková; the same is true of Milena Doleželová-Velingerová in relation to Guo Moruo, D. Kalvodová in relation to Ding Ling, Z. Slupski in relation to Lao She, O. Král in relation to Ba Jin, M. Boušková in relation to Bing Xin, and so on. He was the oldest of all, he had the great amount of inventiveness and intuition, he was more or less immune towards the germs of vulgar Marxism, having studied earlier and being influenced by some elements of Russian formalism and Czech structuralism (the best experts in literary scholarship, e.g. J. Mukařovský or F. Vodička were his colleagues at the Charles University). We were the artisans and he was the *maître*.

Průšek's article *Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature*,⁹ perhaps his most quoted work devoted to modern Chinese literature, was read a paper at the 9th Conference of Junior Sinologists in Paris in 1956. It meant a beginning of his triumphant journey through the countries of Europe and America. M. Gotz in his critical article "The Development of Modern Chinese Literature Studies in the West", characterized Jaroslav Průšek as "widely recognized as having been a true pioneer in the field as well as continuing to be a thorough and provocative scholar".¹⁰ Being "a thorough and provocative scholar" Průšek wrote a long review of C.T. Hsia's book *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* which together with Hsia's reply¹¹ meant the beginning and the end of the most provocative discussion about the nature of modern Chinese literature. Personally I think that Průšek would have done better, if he could have restrained himself and not produced such rigid "scientific" criticism, or ex-

⁹ Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, "Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature". *Archiv orientální*, 25, 1957, 2, pp. 261–286.

¹⁰ Michael GOTZ, "The Development of Modern Chinese Literatures Studies in the West." *Modern China*, 2, July 1976, 3, p. 404.

¹¹ Cf. Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, "Basic Problems of the History of Modern Chinese Literature. A Review of C.T. HSIA, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*." *T'oung Pao* 49, 1962, pp. 357–404 and C.T. HSIA, "On the "Scientific" Study of Modern Chinese Literature – A Reply to Professor Průšek". *Ibid.*, 50, 1963, pp. 428–474.

pressed himself with more *sophrosyne* (temperance),¹² the virtue he extolled so much.

How could something like that happen? The time around 1960 was the second and the last apogee of Průšek's enthusiasm (after the end of the 1940s and the first years of the 1950s) with things social and political in the domestic and international realms. At that time he supported the idea that the end of colonialism and the building up of the new socialist society, were the two hopes of the mankind.¹³ It was possible to accept the first one but the irony of the fate pressed him later to acknowledge the second as a treacherous belief. There was no victory and no defeat in this Průšek–Hsia duel. But it is necessary to say that Průšek was better in his other studies. All the students of modern Chinese are recommended to devote more time to his other works. But this discussion had its significance for the history of modern Chinese literature. Průšek and Hsia coming with such different and even contradictory insights, provoked mainly young students to more deep reflections of literature. But here also his myth and misunderstanding began. His view meant for many provocation in a good or bad sense. Only those who knew Průšek well from his many other works, were able to evaluate him properly. In 1987 Leo Ou-fan Lee's selection of Průšek's studies *The Lyrical and the Epic. Studies in Modern Chinese Literature*, appeared in its Chinese translation.¹⁴ Hsia's contribution to the debate was not included in this Chinese version. At least for me it was because Hsia's ideas were very much incompatible with the cultural and literary policy of the PRC. To read only this article of Průšek with or without Hsia's reply, means to misunderstand him. For the reason of justice it is necessary to say that Průšek and Hsia remained friendly in their scholarly dialogues and occasional meetings. On August 5, 1963 Professor Hsia wrote to me: "Professor Průšek was in New York a few months ago ... Though he has written an unkind review of my book, he is personally most charming and his knowledge of Chinese literature is most expressive." And I have received another letter from my friend Leo Ou-fan Lee who wrote me on October 8, 1990: "Today at my seminar we discussed Průšek's debate with C.T. Hsia, and most of my students attacked Průšek! And I had to come to his defence..." According to my opinion this defence would be superfluous, if the students knew the scholarly writings of both rivals equally well.

As I knew him, Průšek was probably the best when he was putting questions and when he was provoking more deep deliberations. For example, Průšek's idea of "subjective" and "individual" gave an impetus to many studies and possibly even books. Here I have in mind Leo Ou-fan Lee's "The Solitary Traveler: Images of Self in Modern Chinese Literature", in the book *Expressions of*

¹² Cf. Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, "Doslov k soubornému vydání 'Zpěvu staré Číny' z roku 1950" (Epilogue to the Complete Edition of "Songs of Old China" from 1950). In: *Zpěvy staré a nové Číny* (Songs of Old and New China), Prague 1957, p. 230.

¹³ *Světová literatura* (World Literature), 3, 1962, p. 153.

¹⁴ Published by Hunan wenyi chubanshe and translated into Chinese by LI YANQIAO and others.

Self in Chinese Literature, ed. by R.E. Hegel and R.C. Hessney, New York 1985, his chapter called “The Journey of Sentiment” from the book *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1973, Don Price’s “Diary as Autobiography: Two Modern Chinese Cases”, from the volume ed. by C. Ramelb: *Biography. East and West*, Honolulu 1989, Wolfgang Kubin’s “Tradition and Modernism in the 20th Century Chinese Novel” from the book entitled *Die Jagd nach dem Tiger. 6 Versuche zur modernen chinesischen Literatur*, Bochum 1984, Ingo Schaefer’s “Remarks on the Question of Individuality and Subjectivity in the Literature of the May Fourth Period”, in the book edited by me and entitled *Interliterary and Intraliterary Aspects of the May Fourth Movement 1919 in China*, Bratislava 1990, or even Janet A. Walker’s *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and Ideal of Individualism*, Princeton 1979. In the last book, excellent of its kind, the authoress wrote the following: “As any new scholarship rests on the work of earlier scholars I am particularly indebted: Jaroslav Průšek, whose great learning and great enthusiasm for the field of East-West literary relations inspired me to research the ideal of individualism in modern Japanese fiction ...”¹⁵

Another example: Průšek’s predominantly anti-modernist attitude and his stress on the realist tendencies in modern Chinese literature, inspired at least partly his best American pupil Leo Ou-fan Lee to the fruitful studies of modernist tendencies in modern Chinese poetry and fiction, and he found his followers. It is true that Průšek’s attitudes changed somewhat in the 1960s in this respect and he admitted the impact of modernistic trends on modern Chinese literature as possible, but he did not support this assertion by the proper evidence. The impact of Baudelaire or Lautreamont on Lu Xun’s *Ye cao* (Wild Grass) does not sound very convincing.¹⁶

As a translator of Chinese literary and philosophical works into Czech, Průšek was able to appreciate the value of the word, of its semantic and aesthetic charge. The first he probably learned from his teachers, especially from B. Karlgren. Apart from the three works mentioned above, Průšek made accessible for his Czech readers a collection of twelve *huaben* in the years 1947, 1954, 1964 and 1991;¹⁷ he translated Shen Fu’s *Fousheng liu ji* (Six Chapters of Floating Life) published in 1944 and in 1956,¹⁸ Liu E’s *Lao Can you ji* (The Travels

¹⁵ Janet A. WALKER, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1979, p. xii.

¹⁶ Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, “Introduction.” In: *Studies in Modern Chinese Literature*. Berlin, Akademie-Verlag 1964, p. 27. Although Průšek was an eminent Sinologist, his scholarly work was not without shortcomings or inaccuracies, as shown convincingly in a lengthy and conscientious review by Professor LIU TS’UN-YAN of PRŮŠEK’s collection *Chinese History and Literature*. Dordrecht, D. Reidel Publishing Co. 1970, published in: *Selected Papers from the Hall of Harmonious Wind*. Leiden, E.J. Brill 1976, pp. 376–391.

¹⁷ *Podivuhodné příběhy z čínských tržišť a bazarů* (Extraordinary Stories from the Chinese Markets and Bazaars), Prague.

¹⁸ *Šest historií prchavého života*, Prague.

of Lao C'an) from the year 1947 and 1960,¹⁹ *Sunzi bingfa* (The Art of War) from the year 1949²⁰ and a Czech selection of about 1/3 of the stories from Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio) from the year 1955.²¹ Especially the first and the last one just mentioned here, were the products of his painstaking research and deep love of many years.

Once I heard Průšek say that a translation ought to precede every serious work in literary Sinology. He adhered to this principle all his life. If not, then his work became axiologically weak, like his monograph *Die Literatur der befreiten Chinas und ihre Volkstraditionen*, Prague 1955.

Průšek's Confucian inclinations were seen in his attitude to teaching. As a teacher he devoted much time and effort, especially to the postgraduates, reading very carefully the submitted theses or articles. He did not like prolific writers among the young and stressed the importance of the first published works: "If your first study is not good," he used to say to his pupils, "nobody will read you afterwards." My first English article entitled *Mao Tun's Names and Pseudonyms*²² appeared when I was just 30 years old. He encouraged me to publish it probably having in mind the words of Confucius: "San shi er li" (At thirty I stood firm). He himself published his first scholarly articles at the same age in 1936.²³

Průšek's many duties and obligations, as a Director of the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences from 1953 and later permanent representative of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in the Union Académique Internationale, for some time a member of its Executive Bureau representing this body in the Conseil International pour la Philosophie et les Sciences Humaines, Vice-President of the last mentioned institution, and likewise Vice-President of the Fédération Internationale pour les Langues et Littératures Modernes, prevented him devoting much time to undergraduates, but I was so happy that I heard him for 6 school-terms out of 10 during my University studies in Prague. "Despite this load of the public activity (just mentioned, M.G.)," wrote his most devoted friend Professor Augustín Palát, for many years Vice-Director of the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, "he (Průšek, M.G.) always found time not only for lectures at the University or at the regular working sessions of the Oriental Institute staff, for teaching in the courses for foreign post-graduate students coming to him to Prague, but also for extensive

¹⁹ *Putování starého Chromce*, Prague.

²⁰ *O umění válečném*, Prague.

²¹ *Skazky o šestero cest osudu*, Prague. As to Průšek's contribution to translation from Chinese into Czech, see my study "Two from Czech Babel; Mathesius and Průšek in Sino-Bohemian Literary Confrontation." *Archiv orientální*, 63, 1995, 1, pp. 102–111.

²² *Archiv orientální*, 31, 1963, 2, pp. 80–108.

²³ PRŮŠEK's first scholarly article "Císařovna vdova Cze Hsi" (The Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi) and four following it for the encyclopedia *Tvůrcové dějin* (Makers of History), 5, *Přítomnost* (Present Time), 1, 2, pp. 438–451, 150–157 and 438–445, appeared in Prague in 1936, when he was 30 years old.

research work, in which he is increasingly exacting in his demands on others, but in the first place on himself. Hence stems the dilemma of anyone, who wishes to write any kind of characteristics of Průšek – how to show in their proper relations the bipolarity of his personality, the unflagging enthusiasm of the scholar-researcher and the pedagogue on the one hand and the broadly-conceived activities of an organizer on the other, without reducing the general picture to an oversimplified scheme.”²⁴

It is, of course, not possible within the framework of a short article to show the complex personality of Jaroslav Průšek. This one set for his aim to show his human profile through the prism of my own eyes, observations and experience.

Průšek’s “great awakening” became a fact in the year 1963. At that time Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and their existentialist philosophies began to be spread among Czechoslovak intellectuals. Faustian strains, Průšek’s other belief, began to be questioned. One evening when we sat together in front of the Opera in Bordeaux during the 16th Conference of Junior Sinologists (the first in which I participated at) drinking together red Bordeaux wine, he told to me that all human strains and deeds are in fact meaningless, because the future of humankind has got its beginning and will reach its ultimate end; but they are meaningful for us, human individuals, since they are expressions of our joy and self-realization. At that occasion he told me and another colleague and my teacher, Dr. Jarmila Kalousková (1908–1978) that the communists in some points were even worse than the Nazis, since both were killing innocent people, but with the difference, that those first were also defiling their reputation. It was a year after the Liblice conference in 1963, devoted to the life and work of Franz Kafka, which meant a thaw in the Czechoslovak cultural policy and ideological climate. For the first time and openly at the Liblice Castle, built in the refined Rococco style, the Gothic, crude and horrible *Castle* of Franz Kafka had been shown as an example of human, political, social and cultural existence. In 1967 – three years later – at the same castle I heard him at the Orientalist conference (in the presence of Polish Sinologists) say that he was old. At this conference he pronounced openly that he lost confidence in the word “liberation” having in mind his Czechoslovak experience and Chinese history after 1949.

Already before 1963 Průšek tried to build bridges between East and West, and in the second half of the 1960s Prague became a meeting point of many Sinologists (and Orientalists) from Asia, Europe, America and elsewhere. One special journal *New Orient Bimonthly*, founded in Prague in 1960, was intended to serve the noble purpose of broad understanding between East and West. In this time Průšek led a team of specialists who compiled the well-known *Dictionary of Oriental Literatures*, 3 vols., London 1974, of which part, concerned with East Asian countries appeared later in Vermont (USA) and in Tokyo in 1978. The collaboration of Czech and Slovak Sinologists under Průšek’s instructions, was very intensive with the project led by Professor Wolfgang

²⁴ Augustín PALÁT, “Jaroslav Průšek (On the Occasion of the 85th Anniversary of His Birth)”. *Archiv orientální*, 59, 1991, 2, p. 10.

Franke of Hamburg, and concerned with China after its encounter with the West, the outcome of which appeared in the encyclopaedic work *China-Handbuch* in German, edited by Professor Franke and Dr. Brunhild Staiger.

This fruitful collaboration did not last long. On August 22, 1968 the 20th Conference of Chinese Studies (former Junior Sinologues) should have opened in Prague. On August 21, the soldiers of five Eastern European countries led by the “invincible” Soviet Army invaded Czechoslovakia. The conference which should have been devoted to the 50th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, and at which nearly 500 sinologists wanted to participate, was cancelled, and *New Orient Bimonthly* did not appear anymore. In the next two years Průšek’s and his collaborators were discredited. He himself and many others were expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (those who followed A. Dubček’s line), and later also from the Oriental Institute. Průšek’s works, and those of his some collaborators, were put on the “black” lists and could not be published or quoted anymore. Outsiders transformed this institution, famous in the world, into a “service-centre” for politico-economic propaganda of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

Průšek suffered much more than he was able to endure. After 1972 he was not even allowed to visit the Oriental Institute in order not to prevent the process of “normalization”. The year 1968 and its aftermath meant for him a blow; he could no longer live according to the words he told me in Bordeaux. For some years he helped to edit *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* in Leipzig, but that seems to be his only work. From time to time he met some foreign postgraduates, best pupils, friends and colleagues.

Průšek’s speech delivered at Stockholm University in December 1969 on the occasion of receiving the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa was a kind of swan song. It was entitled “Yeh Shao-chün and Anton Chekhov”. This one of few Průšek’s comparative studies analysed the short story of Yeh Shao-chün’s entitled *Ch’iu* (Autumn) and Chekhov’s drama *The Cherry Orchard*. Průšek supposed that the theme “is transposed into a Chinese context, but the basic situation remains the same. The heroine is, for Chinese conditions, somewhat unusual. Though she is already in her thirties, she is not married and earns her living as an independent woman; she is a midwife, but obviously is of higher intellectual standing. She returns from Shanghai to the country for the spring festival of the dead, to visit the graves of her family, and is immediately approached by her sister-in-law, who offers her an excellent match with an older banker. Soon, however, the young woman finds out that behind it is a very ulterior motive: the family wish to sell their old family house and dispose her of twenty mou of land left to her by her father. The excursion to the graves, the recollection of the charm of her early life, provide the lyrical background to the tale. Confused and unhappy at the breaking-up the home where she spent the first sixteen years of her life, the young woman returns to Shanghai.”²⁵

²⁵ Jaroslav PRŮŠEK, “Yeh Shao-chün and Anton Chekhov.” *Archiv orientální*, 38, 1970, 4, p. 451.

Průšek was probably very sad when he read Yeh Shao-chün's short story and re-read or recollected Chekhov's drama. In his own situation and his country, he did not believe in the "end of the past" like Chekhov; he was forced to think about the "end of the future". Sadness coming out from Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* or from Yeh Shao-chün's *Autumn*, was his companion through the rest of his life.

Three months after the events following November 17, 1989 in Czechoslovakia, Professor Leo Ou-fan Lee in his letter dated February 21, 1990 expressed a hope that "his (i.e. Průšek's, M.G.) spirit is happy". In his book *Voices From the Iron House*, Maestro Lee put Lu Xun's soul into hell.²⁶ As far as I remember, Průšek never spoke about hell or heaven with me. Průšek in his afterlife home certainly would like to be in the company of those he liked, or studied much: Confucius, Qu Yuan, Li Bai, Bai Juyi, the narrators and creators of *huaben*, Pu Songling, Shen Fu, Liu E, Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Zheng Zhenduo, Bing Xin, Shen Congwen and others. I personally, following the words of Baudelaire, I would appreciate meeting him "anywhere outside of this world".²⁷

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I do not finish my recollections at this moment. Maybe a few words about Průšek's connections with myth and reality are needed here. There was nothing mythical in him or around him. His clash with C.T. Hsia, his charismatic personality, his oratory abilities, and later his suffering and bitter end in the middle of the period I have characterized here as the "end of the future", provoked many to different, not always appropriate explanations. Průšek was a human being, more talented, more industrious than many of us. In spite of the fact that for him like for Faust: "In the beginning was the Deed,"²⁸ he found enough time to marry three times, to beget a daughter and to enjoy the company of his grandchildren; he had nothing against the presence of the nice and intelligent ladies in his circle and always found time to discuss seriously or with humour with his colleagues, students and friends. As a scholar he was never proud of himself (probably having the image of Confucius in mind). He did not try to hide his deficiencies in the field of knowledge. Once in the year 1959 at one discussion with my colleague and me at the Peking Hotel, he put simply this question: "Who is Ho Qifang? Do you know something about him and about his works?" An arrogant teacher would never ask young pupils something like that. During the late 1940s, up to the beginning 1960s as a Party member he could not work

²⁶ Leo Ou-fan LEE, *Voices from the Iron House. A Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 1987, p. x.

²⁷ This is an allusion to a poem in prose by Ch. BAUDELAIRE entitled "Anywhere Out of the World" from the collection *Le Spleen de Paris*.

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang GOETHE, *Faust*. Part One. Transl. by Philip WAYNE. Penguin Books 1986, p. 71.

against the Party policy in the field of Oriental studies or in general literary studies, since for some time he was the top manager of literary studies in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. But only due to this fact he could make a tremendous deposit into Czech Oriental studies. It would not be possible if those with power in the Party hierarchy would not allow him to do so. I personally believe in Průšek's integrity. I agree with his German friend Professor Herbert Franke who characterized him as a humanist in its best and most wide sense.²⁹

Průšek was really human, maybe, too human.

²⁹ Herbert FRANKE, "Jaroslav Průšek, (14.9. 1906 – 7.4. 1980)." Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1980, p. 6.

I had seen him risk his limbs blindly unlike others at a fox-hunt and in a cricket field; and soon afterwards I saw him risk his life, just as blindly, in the sea at Brighton. We had met there accidentally, and were bathing together. He overwhelmed me with the wildest expressions of affection and in his exaggerated Italian way declared that he should never be happy again until he rendered me some service which I might remember to the end of my days. Little did I think then " little did I think afterwards " that the opportunity of serving me was soon to come; that he was eagerly to seize it on the instant; and that by so doing he was to turn the whole current of my existence into a new channel. Yet so it was.