

INTERVIEW

NEW BOOK ABOUT MARIÁN GÁLIK WAS PUBLISHED IN BEIJING

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This is an interview with Dr. Marián Gálik at the occasion of publishing the book concerning to his research written by Mrs. Yang Yuying. Dr. Gálik mentions here his lifelong work in the field of Chinese studies, his studies of sinology at Charles University in Prague and the whole atmosphere of Prague sinology in the time of his studies, the situation in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, influence of Western intellectual history on modern and contemporary Chinese literature.

Keywords: sinology, Chinese literature, comparative literature

Daniela Zhang Cziráková: I met Dr. Marián Gálik when I started to study sinology at the Comenius University in 1988. He was, together with Dr. Anna Doležalová, one of the founders of Chinese studies in Slovakia and I was one of the first students in this field. He devoted a large part of his life to research contemporary Chinese literature, what was also one of the subjects taught by him at the university. I remember very clearly also his lessons of Chinese philosophy, classical Chinese, his views and opinions which he here he presented his views not only on Chinese philosophy and literature. Few years after completing doctoral studies at Charles University in 2002, in 2010 I started working at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, where Dr. Marián Gálik worked, so I became his younger colleague.

D.Z.: *Mr. Gálik, you are regarded as a renowned Sinologist among the one or two hundred well-known scholars who have been mentioned in at least two Chinese surveys¹, since the beginning of Sinology from the end of the 16th century to this day. According to available information, you are the first foreigner, about whom a book has been written by the Chinese during his lifetime. Books about others have usually been written after their deaths. It was last year in August of 2015 when in the Sinological History Series of the Xueyuan chubanshe 学苑出版社 Academic Publishers, Beijing, an extensive publication by Mrs. Professor Yang Yuying 杨玉英 entitled *Mali'an Gaolike de hanxue yanjiu* 马立安。高利克的汉学研究 *Sinological Studies of Marián Gálik* was published. Could you say a few words about the creation of this book?*

M.G.: I met Mrs. Yang at a conference in the city of Jinan in Shandong province in 2010. Here she read a presentation about my Prague teacher Professor Jaroslav Průšek which intrigued me very much. We got into a conversation of which I found out, that she was quite well informed of my work. She became even more intensively interested in my work after a year or two. I was sending her my works that were not found in Chinese libraries. She received two grants from her university in Leshan in Xichuan province in order to finish her 489 pages long book. This monograph mainly deals with the analyses of my books and studies. The first chapter, about my sixty years long study of Sinology between the years 1953 – 2012 was written by me. The whole book was written as a *hommage* to my eightieth birthday in 2013. Due to some editorial and other changes it was published later than had been expected. Because of her modesty, the moment of surprise and secrecy, she never informed me of her work and I am immensely grateful to her for it.

D.Z.: *As you just mentioned, Professor Yang Yuying deals with the presentation of your scholarly work in detail, starting with your studies at Charles University. The biggest part of this book is devoted to the research of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in China and also in the West. It is a well-known fact, that Sinologists have done a great deal of research, not only in the field of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, but also in other areas of Chinese culture. Why is it that your works are being translated into Chinese and are serving as teaching materials at major Chinese universities?*

¹ Available at (<http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-364-11521-1.shtml> and www.fyedu.net/info/133003-1.htm) (June 20, 2016).

M.G.: According to the initial plan of the author, the book was to only contain my work in the field of modern and contemporary Chinese literature. It was probably the initiative of the chief editor of the book series published by Academic Publishers Yan Chunde 阎纯德, professor of Beijing University and expert on the works of the first Slovak sinologists Dr. Anna Doležalová-Vlčková (1935 – 1992) and me. He wished that the book would cover my entire Sinological writings. With the substantial financial support of Hong Kong's patron Mr. Wu Zhiliang 吴志良 this became possible and the book was published in its current form. On your question, why are my works often translated into Chinese, one can only reply that there was a need for it in Chinese academe because my work complements what was missing in it or it was providing different analyses. Especially my works, that were published in English between the years 1969 – 1986 which have presented a different point of view for Chinese experts in the fields of modern Chinese literature, literary thinking and in comparative literature. After the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) and before opening China to the world in the 1980s, they did not know enough of it. If they knew, they did not dare to write, or rather they could not. Marxism whether in Leninist or in Maoist understanding closed their eyes and they were surprised how their older colleagues from the time before 1949, prior to the foundation of the People's Republic of China, managed to build on the literary legacy of classical Greece and Rome, Renaissance, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Naturalism, Realism, Symbolism, Expressionism and various avant-garde trends. My book *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism (1917 – 1930)*, published in English ends in the year in which the Marxist-oriented Left League of Chinese writers was established. Its Chinese version appeared twice: once in 1997 and the other in 2000. My second book *Milestones in Chinese-Western Literary Confrontation (1898 – 1978)* was also published in Chinese in two editions in 1990 and in 2008. Also, my two other books were published in Chinese: *Jieke he Siluofake hanxue yanjiu* 捷克和斯洛伐克汉学研究 *Sinological Research in Bohemia and in Slovakia*, in Beijing in 2009 by the Academic Publishers in Beijing, and the translation of Professor Yang Yuying of my *Mao Tun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism* that originally appeared in English in Wiesbaden in 1969 and in Chinese in Taipei in 2014. Until now on the basis of possibly incomplete bibliographic data, one hundred eighteen of my articles or chapters from my books, and also four of my books have been published in Chinese.

D.Z.: *You studied in Prague under Professor Průšek. Was it he, who brought you to modern literature? To what degree has the Prague school, whether sinological or comparative influenced you?*

M.G.: It was not in the habit of Professor Průšek to propose or specify the topics of themes that his students should study or work on. I was far more interested in old Chinese history and philosophy, but I became ill in the last years of my studies and due to the illness I had to spend more than six months in hospital and in a sanatorium. This made me decide on new literature that was due to the language easily understandable. Especially in Prague for this kind of literature was relative abundant material. I am of course, one of the members of the Prague Sinological School led by Průšek, but during my years in Prague (1953 – 1958) comparative literature was regarded as bourgeois quasi-science and I started to be engaged in it later in 1964. With the exception of Frank Wollman and Jan Mukařovský, none of my Czech comparatists made an impression on me. Firstly, I was taught by American and French, then Russian and my last but foremost friend Dionýz Ďurišin.

D.Z.: *Chinese literature from the first half of the 20th century was very strongly influenced by Western literature and culture. To what extent did this fact reflect positively or negatively on the quality of literary works?*

M.G.: A responsible answer to your question would be writing a whole monograph. I wrote three books about Chinese literature as I have mentioned before. A part of my work is relating to the young Chinese intellectuals who were influenced by Western intellectual history. Predominantly I was writing about the German *Geistesgeschichte*. I compiled a book of bibliography entitled *Preliminary Research-Guide: German Impact on Modern Chinese Intellectual History*, Munich 1971. I wrote several studies about others in English and these studies were also partly published in Chinese. Overall we can assert that Chinese literature and Chinese intellectual history from the end of the 19th century until the 1930s should be considered as valuable. Later stages of development did not attain such standards, but still there were some remarkable works written during this period. But, after Mao Zedong's total domination over Chinese culture in 1956 there was little quality overall and the excellent published works were unduly criticised and their writers ruthlessly persecuted. Some kind of relieve occurred in the years 1984 – 1988, but it was in 1989 after suppressing Tiananmen Square student protests, that asked for more academic freedom and democracy did the situation deteriorated again. Later on there were also some good works written, but they could not offend the cultural policy or the interests of the Communist Party.

D.Z.: *In Mrs. Yang's book a lot of space is dedicated to three writers, Lu Xun (1881 – 1936), Guo Moruo (1892 – 1979) and Mao Dun (1896 – 1981). This trio is well known and their works were translated in the former Czechoslovakia.*

As can be seen from the quoted material, you paid them in your work the biggest attention. What do you say to the fact, that some Chinese literary scholars from the end of the last century and from the early years of this century doubted their importance in Chinese literature and also the sunny side they were put in.

M.G.: Yes, there were some doubts. Surely you are familiar with the Latin proverb “De omnibus est dubitandum” (Everything must be doubted). Supposedly it comes from Aristotle, but certainly it was used by many others like Descartes, Kierkegaard and also Marx, whose teachings could not be questioned during my younger years. Such actions could lead to unpleasant penalties at the time during Communist rule. Frankly, not about everything, but some doubts are certainly possible and welcome. In China, such doubts started after the adequate development of comparative literature in the 1980s when scholars and even writers realised, where and in what can be Chinese literature compared to European or American literature and especially with its post-realistic modernist tendencies. Many have been mentioned, such as Lao She (1899 – 1966), whose best novel *Rickshaw*, was translated into Slovak by me in 1962 and it was published in two more editions. Also those, who were prohibited from writing up to the end of the Cultural Revolution, have been mentioned. A great enthusiasm for spreading Lu Xun’s work to the world began in 2011 led by his grandson Zhou Lingfei. The Chinese started with an intensive propagation of his work at international conferences. But because of the lack of success recently, they partially abandoned from this trend. Guo Moruo ruined his reputation in poetry and in cultural history with his excessive adherence to Marxism and to Maoism and finally also with his devotion to the infamous Cultural Revolution. However, his achievements in the area of literature, social sciences and especially in Chinese archaeology should not be forgotten.

D.Z.: Your scholarly work involves in particular the research of Mao Dun’s works, whom you probably knew personally. Which of his works left the biggest impression on you and why?

M.G.: I knew Mao Dun, writer and long time minister of culture of PRC, personally. He read a long abstract of my dissertation, which was recommended to him by Professor Průšek. After we started communicating and meeting, he read and revised my articles written in Chinese to the end of my stay in Beijing. His numerous works that informed Chinese readers of foreign and especially of European literary, made the biggest impression upon me and it had a great response throughout China. From his creative writings I have to mention his novel *Twilight*, describing Shanghai and it's surrounding in the year 1930.

Already in my early childhood I admired mythically tinged biblical stories about Patriarch Jacob and King David. Mao Dun created in his novel a modern replica of the Scandinavian myth Ragnarok (Twilight of the Gods). New gods of the pantheon led by the mythical giant Thrym decided to bring an end to the rule of the old gods. They failed like the Shanghai workers led by the communists lost their battle with the Chinese capitalists. Before that, he wrote a whole book on Northern mythology.

D.Z.: Mrs. Yang's publication mainly deals with your contribution in the research of modern Chinese literature, but comparative studies represent an important subject of your interest.

M.G.: I am predominantly a literary comparatist. I was inspired by Harvard University Professor Harry Levin's motto "What is literature, if not comparative?" Most of my studies, reviews, reports from congresses and from conferences, which I wrote for over 50 years of my scholarly career, are comparative. Practically, nearly all my works have a comparative character. Both those that are dealing with modern as well as with traditional Chinese literature.

D.Z.: Currently your research is dealing with the impact of the Bible upon Chinese literature. Could you describe this impact on Chinese literature?

M.G.: It is not only now, but I have been dealing with this kind of research for more than a quarter-century. I am also conducting my research concerned with typological similarities and differences between Chinese and Hebrew culture in the years around 1000 – 476 B. C. This area has not been studied among Western Sinologists so far. The influence of the Bible upon modern and contemporary Chinese literature cannot be compared with the works of classical literature of Greece or Rome, European classicism or with later literary movements, but Bible, as a great piece of world literature, appealed to Chinese poets, novelists, playwrights and to literary scholars to a great extent.

D.Z.: You are also the founder of the Slovak Sinology. It was thanks to you, that Chinese studies were opened at the FFUK in 1988 for the first time. How do you feel about its beginnings?

M.G.: There were two of us at the founding: besides me, there was also Dr. Anna Doležalová-Vlčková. I had to work out the plans for the whole study, give lectures on ancient Chinese literature, history, philosophy and also on intercultural communication. After twelve years, I retired. My three students are

working at the Comenius University now and you in our Institute of Oriental Studies.

D.Z.: How has your worldview changed after contact with Chinese culture and its philosophy? Or, in other words, did China as such change you?

M.G. If you understand under the worldview system of ethical, philosophical, religious and social values, if they are not condemnable, they are in some measure different in particular cultural circles. They are more or less differentiated, but because of the need of mutual understanding among these cultures, we have to regard them as equal. I have learned much from Chinese culture, but I stayed loyal to the heritage of my forefathers, by that I mean to our Euro-American cultural sphere, even though I appreciate the Chinese contribution to my intellectual development very much.

D.Z.: There are opinions alike that a small country such as Slovakia, cannot afford to develop fields, for instance, Sinology appearing in the media from time to time. You and your lifetime works are evidence that similar views are wrong and misled. Could you comment on this?

M.G.: I heard such opinions about Oriental studies even fifty years ago. What are Oriental studies good for, when we did not have colonies? Did our Central-European neighbours have colonies? They developed Oriental studies or Sinology for one century or for more before us! We really have to deal with studying Asian and African countries as long as our State budget and also well prepared scientific and pedagogical personnel allows. Unfortunately, we are considerably lagging behind and in this field, we appear in one of the last places in EU.

D.Z.: Thank you for the interview.