

# *Pro Domo versus Pro Foro Externo:* People's Republic of China in the 1950s as Perceived by Czechoslovak Visitors\*

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*Pro domo verzus pro foro externo: Čínska ľudová republika 50-tych rokov očami československých návštěvníkův*

*Resumé* Príspevok analyzuje obraz Číny v cestovnom denníku Lumíra Jisla, českého kunsthistorika a archeológa, ktorý ju navštívil na prelome rokov 1957–1958, v kontraste s dobovým oficiálnym obrazom „riše stredu“ v publikovaných knižných cestopisoch (napr. V. Mináč, A. Hoffmeiser). Cieľom príspevku je ilustrovať na jednej strane schematicost' a stereotypnost' tohto oficiálneho, štátom sankcionovaného obrazu socialistickej Číny a poukázať na osobitú perspektívnu textov, ktoré neboli určené na publikovanie.

*Abstract* The paper analyses depiction of China in the travel diary of Lumír Jisl, a Czech archaeologist and art historian, who visited it in late 1957 and early 1958; in comparison with the official portrayal of the 'Middle Kingdom' in published books (e.g., Mináč, Hoffmeiser). The contribution focuses on the contrast between the stereotyped and schematic state-sanctioned portrayal of socialist China and the more personal perspective of texts not intended for publication.

*Key words* People's Republic of China · Czechoslovakia · 1950s · Travel Writing · Lumír Jisl

The recently published travel diary of Lumír Jisl<sup>1</sup> (1921–1969) provides a unique testimony about the People's Republic of China in the second half of the 1950s.

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<sup>1</sup> Lumír Jisl, *Čínský deník* [Chinese Diary], ed. by Luboš Bělka and Pavel Šindelář (Brno: Munipress,

The particularity of Jisl's perspective lies in the fact that we can follow his Chinese journey through the first-hand impressions he noted down on a daily basis. The private character of his travel diary in which he recorded his stay in China between 6 September 1957 and 10 February 1958<sup>2</sup> enabled him to voice his thoughts regardless of the propaganda and predominant ideology of the period. This allows him to construe an 'unretouched' depiction of China in the early period of the construction of socialism as an informed writer, a receptive observer and from time to time a frustrated official guest. Apparently it was not the intention of Jisl to publish a travelogue about China in a book form in a Czechoslovak state-owned (and state-controlled) publishing house, which would have resulted in the elimination of all the critical parts and the portrayal of China would have had to comply with the stereotyped and idealized image of socialist 'New China'.

During the 1950s a plentitude of travelogues was published in Czechoslovakia (never before and never afterwards have been so many books about China published in Czechoslovakia), which were written by official Czech and Slovak guests of the Beijing regime. These books provide a rich comparative material for analysis of the state-sanctioned image of China and the uncensored private writings of Lumír Jisl. The comparison between the official perception of China and Jisl's critical assessment of Chinese developments will illustrate the unique character of this primary source in an era of uncritical enthusiasm for the construction of communism in socialist Eurasia. Although he did not speak Chinese, Jisl's diary remains an interesting source because he read a number of scholarly works about Chinese history and culture and did not focus on the successes of the Beijing regime in the period of socialism (as was usually the case in the published works by Czechoslovak pro-regime writers); but in the centre of his interest lied Chinese past which reflected his academic background in archaeology and history of art.<sup>3</sup>

2016). For a detailed account of the personal and professional life of Lumír Jisl, see Luboš Bělka, »Život a dílo Lumíra Jisla« [Life and Work of Lumír Jisl], in *Čínský deník*, 198–215.

2 For an itinerary of this five months long trip, see Pavel Šindelář, »Bedeckr pro cestování ve stopách Lumíra Jisla« [Baedeker for Travelling in Lumír Jisl's Footsteps], in *Čínský deník*, 216–239.

3 Among the books published about China during 1950s and in early 1960s, there is only one which

The purpose of this paper is to put Jisl's journey and travel diary within the context of evolving Czechoslovak-Chinese relations in the 1950s, which included scientific cooperation. I will first focus on the characteristic features of the official perception of China in Czechoslovakia during 1950s in the published travelogues. The following part provides an analysis of the image of China in Jisl's travel diary and a focus on particular topics found both in the travel diary and the published travelogues, that will illustrate the unique perspective of Lumír Jisl and its contribution to the research on the changing depiction of China in Czechoslovakia in 1950s, as well as to the question of the *modus operandi* of trips organized for official guests of Chinese government in 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

The travelogues of Western leftist intellectuals who visited China in the same period provide an interesting comparative framework to which I will refer. The American-Hungarian historian Paul Hollander (b1932) wrote a detailed and

was written by an author with a strong background in East Asian studies; namely the Mongolist, Tibetologist and linguist Pavel Poucha (1905–1986). His travelogue *Do nitrá Ásie* [Into the Heart of Asia] (Prague: Orbis, 1962) provides a comparative framework to Jisl's diary, as Poucha was also primarily interested in Chinese past and several places mentioned in Jisl's diary were visited also by Poucha. Moreover, to a certain degree their stay in China overlapped. On the depiction of Tibetan Buddhism in Poucha's book, see Luboš Bělka, »Československé studium buddhismu v padesátých a šedesátých letech 20. století: bádaní v Ásii« [The Czechoslovak Academic Study of Buddhism in the 1950s and 1960s: Field Research in Asia], in *Medzi Východom a Západom. Multikultúrne procesy, migrácia a náboženstvo v Strednej Európe* [Between East and West. Multicultural Processes, Migration and Religion in Central Europe], ed. by Roman Kečka a Jana Benická (Bratislava: Chronos, 2014), 90–114. On the description of religions in China in the travelogues from 1950s, see also Martin Slobodník, »Lamaism, the living anachronism—Depiction of Tibetan Buddhism in Czechoslovak Travelogues from 1950s«, in *The 8th Annual Czech and Slovak Sinological Conference 2014. Proceedings*, ed. by Martin Lavička and Martina Rysová (Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, 2015), 111–130; Martin Slobodník, »Temples became silent a long time ago—Reflections of Chinese Religions in Czechoslovak Travelogues from the 1950s«, *Journal of Sino-Western Communications*, 7,1 (2015), 147–162.

<sup>4</sup> For the sophisticated system of management of foreigners in the PRC, see Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign to Serve China. Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham; New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

informative monograph<sup>5</sup> about these ‘political pilgrims’. In contrast to Czechoslovak authors these writers had to face negative perception of the People’s Republic of China during the Cold War era in their home countries and the goal of their travel accounts was to deliver an alternative to their readership in the Western countries—more positive depiction of China. At the same time it has to be taken into account, that these Western travelogues were published in journals and publishing houses, which were not under such a strict censorship as it was the case in Czechoslovakia during 1950s and thus they may have provided a more balanced and complex depiction of China.

### 1 *Historical Background—Honeymoon of Mutual Relations*

Czechoslovakia had become a socialist country and a satellite of the Soviet regime after seizure of power by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and representatives of the Chinese Communist Party proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. The ideological proximity of these two socialist countries facilitated large-scale political, economic, and cultural cooperation. The first cultural agreement between Czechoslovakia and the PRC was signed in spring 1952, when the Czechoslovak governmental delegation led by Václav Kopecký (1897–1961), Minister of Information and Propaganda, visited China.<sup>6</sup> Zhu De 朱德 (1886–

5 Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928–1978* (London; New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

6 Zdeněk Trhlík, *Československo-čínské vztahy. I. část, období let 1949–1965* [Czechoslovak-Chinese Relations. Part 1, the Period 1949–1965] (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 1985), 63. This visit resulted in the publication of two books. Václav Kopecký, Alois Neuman and other authors (who were also members of the delegation) wrote *Ve veliké čínské zemi* [In the Great Country of China] (Prague: Orbis, 1953). Alois Neuman, Minister of Telecommunications, also authored another book entitled *Čína a její lid* [China and its People] (Prague: Orbis, 1954). Both authors provided basic information about the history of China, and its current developments, and refrained from any personal comments or descriptions of first-hand experiences.

1976), Vice Chairman of the PRC, officially visited Czechoslovakia in January 1956 and both the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Viliam Široký (1902–1971) and the President Antonín Novotný (1904–1975) paid official visits to China in March 1957 and October 1959 respectively. Mutual relations were sealed by a number of treaties and agreements, which illustrated the close contacts between these two socialist countries. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the PRC was signed in March 1957 during the visit of Viliam Široký in Beijing.<sup>7</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed analysis of this initial period of Czechoslovak-Chinese relations,<sup>8</sup> but the political context played a crucial role because cultural cooperation (which included the visits of Czech and Slovak writers, journalists and scientists in China) was conditioned by close political partnership between the two regimes; whereas cultural and scientific exchanges were a ‘by-product’ of the contacts established among the highest echelon of government officials and party leaders. Jisl’s stay in China was a result of the growing cultural and scientific cooperation as he was an official guest of the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences that organized his trip.

The ascension to power by the communist regimes included launch of socialist reforms (e.g., land reforms, nationalization of industries) and a fierce Marxist campaign which resulted in state organized violence (‘class struggle’ in the Marxist vocabulary of the period) targeted against those social classes which were labelled class enemies and subsequently against ‘internal enemies’ within the ranks

7 Czechoslovakia was the third country (after the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic) from the socialist camp, that signed such a treaty with China. See Trhlík, *Československo-čínské vztahy*, 94–97.

8 So far, only few scholarly works have dealt with the political relations between China and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, see Trhlík, *Československo-čínské vztahy*; Daniela Kolenovská, »Mezi dvěma slunci: Československo ve střetu Moskvy a Pekingu o mezinárodní komunistické hnutí (1953–1962)« [Between Two Suns: Czechoslovakia in the Conflict of Moscow and Beijing over the International Communist Movement, 1953–1962], *Soudobé dějiny* 21,4 (2014), 531–558. For the economic cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the PRC, see Aleš Skřivan, ml., *Československý vývoz do Číny 1918–1992* [Czechoslovak Export to China 1918–1992] (Prague: Scriptorium, 2009).

of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> In comparison to Czechoslovakia, China was a poor and underdeveloped country during 1950s.



Plate 1

Václav Kopecký (second from left), Minister of Information and Propaganda, presents the Czechoslovak car, an official gift from Klement Gottwald (1896–1953), the Czechoslovak President and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, to Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976), 9 May 1952 (author's personal archive).

Two visits were crucial with regard to the dissemination of information about China through travelogues. In the summer and autumn of 1952 the Vít Nejedlý

9 For a detailed analysis of the tragic process of the establishment of communist power in China in the 1950s, see Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation. A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945–1957* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

Military Art Ensemble toured China. Czech members of this delegation published the first popular travelogues about China in book form after 1954.<sup>10</sup> The largest Czechoslovak cultural delegation visited the PRC from 23 September till 11 December 1953, and it included such prominent writers as Adolf Hoffmeister (1902–1973), Vojtech Mihálik (1926–2001), Pavel Kohout (b1928), Marie Majerová (1882–1967), Marie Pujmanová (1893–1958), the painter Mária Medvecká (1914–1987), the director of the National Gallery in Prague, Vladimír Novotný (1901–1977), the theatre director and actor Andrej Bagar (1900–1966), and the sinologist Danuška Šťovíčková (1929–1976).<sup>11</sup> Exactly a year later, the Slovak writer Vladimír Mináč (1922–1996) and the Czech writer Jarmila Glazarová (1901–1977) paid a visit to China and they too published books about China.<sup>12</sup> Later in the 1950s, several other Czech and Slovak journalists and writers visited China and published their travel accounts. Their stays in China were organized by the Chinese government and they were dispatched to China on official visits by Czechoslovak unions of journalists or writers. Below I will also refer to the writings of Slovak authors Rudo Moric (1921–1985; he visited China in 1956 on his way to Vietnam), Ladislav Mňáčko (1919–1994; he went to China and Mongolia in 1956), Vladimír Ferko (1925–2002; he paid a visit to China in 1957), Rudolf Fabry (1915–1982; he was in

- <sup>10</sup> Jaroslav Čech, Vojtěch Jasny, and Karel Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květů* [We Went to the Country of Flowers] (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1954); František Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři* [China in the Sketch Book] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1954). During this tour the documentary film *Lidé jednoho srdce* [People of One Heart] (1953, directors: Karel Kachyňa, Vojtěch Jasny) was made. Hana Suchá wrote a paper about the visit of this military art ensemble, see Hana Suchá, »Armádní umělecký soubor Vít Nejedlého v Čínské lidové republice v roce 1952« [Vít Nejedlý Military Art Ensemble in the People's Republic of China in the Year 1952], *Dální východ/Far East* 3,1–2 (2013), 94–116.
- <sup>11</sup> Michaela Pejčochová, »Původ a formování sbírky čínského malířství dvacátého století v Národní galerii v Praze« [The Origin and the Formation of the Collection of Chinese 20th Century Painting in the National Gallery in Prague], in *Mistři čínské tušové malby 20. století ze sbírek Národní galerie v Praze* [Masters of 20th Century Chinese Ink Painting from the Collection of the National Gallery in Prague], ed. by Michaela Pejčochová (Prague: Národní galerie, 2008), 31.
- <sup>12</sup> Jarmila Glazarová, *Jaro Číny* [Chinese Spring] (Prague: Státní nakladatelství dětské knihy, 1954); Vladimír Mináč, *V krajině, kde vychodí slnko* [In the Country where the Sun Rises] (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1955). Glazarová wrote her book even before visiting China.

China in the end of 1957 and the beginning of 1958) and Milan Ferko (1929–2010; he went to China in December 1964).<sup>13</sup>

## 2 *Perception of China in Czechoslovak Travelogues from 1950s—Eulogy to Socialism*

Knowledge of China in Czechoslovakia was scarce<sup>14</sup> and once the People's Republic of China joined the socialist camp in October 1949 the need arose for bridging the gap between the citizens of Czechoslovakia and this geographically and culturally distant country. This should have built a sense of brotherhood between these two nations, which were jointly—under the leadership of the Soviet Union—building socialism and defending peace against ‘imperialist aggressors’. Travelogues written by Slovak and Czech authors, which were published either in book form or in journals and newspapers, became an important propaganda tool as they bore witness to China's progress, and thus contributed to overcoming the barrier of ignorance between the two ‘friendly nations’. Authentic reportage and literary travelogues provided the general public with insights into a country, which, unless one was one of its prominent guests, was only open to be visited by a very limited few. These state-sponsored trips for Czech and Slovak pro-regime authors, who generally were not previously very knowledgeable about China; resulted in the publishing of travelogues commissioned by state and party authorities. These

<sup>13</sup> Some of the Czech and Slovak travelogues from China were briefly tackled by Anton Lauček, *Svedectvo reportáží z 'krajín, kde vychádza slnko'* [Witness Records from ‘Lands where the Sun Rises’] (Ružomberok: M-servis, 2009). For a good overview of several topics repeatedly mentioned in the travelogues, see Tiziana D'Amico, »Some Remarks on Propaganda and Slovak Travel Literature (1955–1958)«, *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 8 (2009), 111–135.

<sup>14</sup> »Until recently everything about this country was enwrapped by the mystery of the enormous distance which separated us.«—Čech, Jasný and Kachyná, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 16. For more on the notion of China in late 19th century Czech society, see Filip Suchomel and Marcela Suchomelová, *And the Chinese Cliffs Emerged out of the Mist... Perception and Image of China in Early Photographs* (Prague: Arbor vitae, 2011), 81–118.

works represented part of the compulsory ‘publication output’ for the prominent writers, and were to serve for the education of the masses.

From a literary perspective the travelogues of China represent a wide range of styles: some authors preferred a style similar to documentary reportage (Mináč), while others strived for a more personal perspective with some poetic passages (Mňačko). One author transformed her Chinese experience into a series of poems (Pujmanová), and other texts were intended specifically for the young reader (Ferko, Glazarová). Despite these differences, the common features of these travelogues prevail—all the authors depict a very positive image of China, which is both idealistic and idealized. They highlighted their enthusiasm for the construction of a socialist regime while all the negative experiences during their stays in China were consciously (through self-censorship) excluded from their accounts, or were later eliminated by censors as these books were published (often in quite numerous print runs in order to secure a large readership) in state-controlled publishing houses. The authors of these travelogues were pro-regime intellectuals, and their loyalty towards the Czechoslovak communist regime was a *conditio sine qua non* for their dispatch on an official visit to China. The publishing of travelogues was an assignment from the state and party authorities, which they had to deliver after the sightseeing tour to China. The texts are usually written in straightforward and simple language intended to reach the broad masses<sup>15</sup> and the authors provide readers with a schematic portrayal of China.

The itinerary of the authors’ trips was usually similar, and it included traditional political and administrative centers (Beijing, Shanghai, Canton), as well as new industrial strongholds (Wuhan 武漢, Shenyang 沈陽), or cities that represented traditional Chinese culture (Hangzhou 杭州, Xi'an 西安). In the eyes of the foreign visitors these cities had a distinctive symbolic propagandistic value: a stay in Shenyang or Wuhan gave the authors an opportunity to praise the dynamic industrialization of China after 1949.<sup>16</sup> However, when describing Shanghai, the writers tackled two antithetical topics: the city symbolized the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921 and thus the very birth

<sup>15</sup> Lauček, *Svedectvo reportáží*, 45–46.

<sup>16</sup> See Adolf Hoffmeister, *Poblednice z Číny* [Postcard from China] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1956), 154, 160–163; Marie Pujmanová, *Čínský úsměv* [The Chinese Smile] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1954), 53–55; Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 59–60.

of 'New China', but at the same time the recent past of Shanghai (late 19th and early 20th century) encapsulated for them the exploitation of China by Western imperialism.<sup>17</sup> Official foreign visitors were usually required to participate in the Chinese National Day celebrations held on 1 October at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The festivities usually included eulogies of the vigour of the Chinese nation and the bright future of socialist China, glorifications of the resolution of the Chinese masses to defend socialism against its enemies; and the large-scale parade illustrated the triumph of socialism.<sup>18</sup> While describing their stay in China the authors consistently applied the class principle; for example, during a visit to the former Beihai 北海 Imperial compound in the centre of Beijing, it was stressed that that this is the »recreational area of Beijing workers«.<sup>19</sup>

A favourite narrative strategy employed by the authors, who wanted to emphasize their travelogues' authenticity, was the inclusion of recurrent portrayals of individual destinies of carefully selected representatives of socialist China's progressive classes (workers, peasants, members of the pro-regime intelligentsia). The kaleidoscope of these model heroes also included some members of the former exploiting class who had relinquished their assets and possessions, acknowledged their 'mistakes' in re-education programs, and contributed to the construction of the new socialist China.<sup>20</sup> The life stories of these 'ordinary citizens' were supposed to illustrate the rising living standards of the Chinese nation after the establishment of the communist regime and their dedication to

<sup>17</sup> Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 50–56; Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 76–79; Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 70–76; Hoffmeister, *Pohlednice z Číny*, 138–139.

<sup>18</sup> For the political and symbolic role of these parades in Maoist China, see Chang-tai Hung, »Mao's Parades: State Spectacles in China in the 1950s«, *The China Quarterly* 190 (2007), 411–431.

<sup>19</sup> Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 16. Similarly, Rudo Moric stated during the visit of the Forbidden City in Beijing: »Nowadays entirely ordinary Chinese people walk through the palaces. Workers and peasants, students and soldiers.«—Rudo Moric, *Pri zakliatej rieke* [By the Enchanted River] (Bratislava: Mladé letá, 1958), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ladislav Mňáčko, *Ďaleko je do Whampoa* [Whampoa is Far Away] (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavatelstvo politické literatúry, 1958), 190–194; Vladimír Ferko, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor* [The Typhoon is a Good Wind] (Bratislava: Mladé letá, 1959), 34–37.

building a ‘New China’, and at the same time to familiarize readers in Czechoslovakia with current developments in China in a didactic manner.<sup>21</sup> The orchestrated and prearranged character of these interviews is clearly reflected in the critical internal travel report from autumn 1954 written by Jarmila Glazarová (who visited China together with Vladimír Mináč)—due to organizational problems the Chinese hosts had prepared an identical itinerary for them as was the case with the above mentioned large Czechoslovak cultural delegation in autumn 1953. Not only the itinerary was identical, but also the ‘spontaneous meetings’ with representatives of Chinese progressive classes who were interviewed in 1953. These accounts were subsequently published in Czechoslovakia: »We spoke with leading labourers and shock workers and we knew their tales word by word from the short stories and articles of the last year’s delegation.«<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, these prefabricated portrayals of life stories of particular Chinese people served a different aim: they were to bring home to the reader the obvious fact that the Chinese people are also human beings of the same ‘flesh and blood’ as themselves. People who in the past—similarly as in Czechoslovakia—suffered under the yoke of local and foreign exploiters from which they were liberated by the communist parties and now they, the Czechoslovak and Chinese people, jointly contributed to the construction of the socialist camp. One of the central motives of the travelogues is the brotherhood and solidarity of the two culturally and geographically distant nations interconnected by ideological proximity and their shared enthusiasm for the building of socialism. The travelogues were intended to mobilize public support in Czechoslovakia for the PRC and all the authors repeatedly stress the common struggle, shared destiny and comradeship in the battle against the enemies of socialism: »The soldier stands at the fort / in a curly fur hat / in the rough north of China / bundled in fur, / he guards the bastion and the Chinese railway line—/ you know what? He also guards Prague.«<sup>23</sup> This motive of the international brotherhood of the

<sup>21</sup> For a synoptic typology of these characters, see D’Amico, »Some Remarks on Propaganda and Slovak Travel Literature (1955–1958)«, 121–127.

<sup>22</sup> Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Teritorial Department – General, China, 1945–1959, box nr. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Pujmanová, Čínský úsměv, 55; see also Hoffmeister, *Pohlednice z Číny*, 174. The theme of common

proletariat which trespassed the borders of individual states also appeared in the International Workers' Day parades in Czechoslovakia where a banner referred directly to China: »From [the Western Bohemian city of] Aš up to Shanghai the red flag flies high.«<sup>24</sup> The authors repeatedly stress that the Czechoslovak and Chinese people were part of the same historical process: »China. The Great Power. The country that shifted the global political scales in Southeast Asia towards socialism. The country that brought new truths to the treasure-house of Marxism. The country with colossal political, economic and cultural achievements, which in London and Washington they used to call—with certain apprehension—Chinese miracles. China stands on our side.«<sup>25</sup>

A similar motif can be found in the travelogue written by F. Skála: »We, people longing for peace and peaceful labour, are one big family and our boys keeping guard on the Šumava frontier [with West Germany] are defending the tranquil sleep of Chinese children in the same way as the Korean volunteer lying in the ditches suffers for the happiness of our kids.«<sup>26</sup>

Large rallies of the labouring masses were organized by state authorities with the aim of strengthening the friendship between the two nations and disseminating information about the befriended country on each side. During the visit of the official Czechoslovak delegation in China, Minister Kopecký gave a

struggle can also be illustrated with the following quotation: »If they would shoot you, Wang Li, we will shoot back together with you; and in case they would start with us, where, where would they end, if your whole great country will rise and in the same way as the storm drives the sand, you will drive them out and they will never, never recover themselves!—Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa,  
*Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Ferková, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 207.



Plate 2

*Mass rally of Chinese workers at the Shanghai municipality hall, where in April 1952 Václav Kopecký, Minister of Information and Propaganda, delivered a lecture about recent developments in socialist Czechoslovakia under the banner »Long live the friendship between the people of China and Czechoslovakia« (author's personal archive).*

speech in Beijing on 9 May 1952 where he introduced the Czechoslovak path towards socialism. By the end of April 1952 some 2000 workers gathered in Shanghai in the municipality hall and V. Kopecký gave a lecture under the portraits of Joseph V. Stalin (1878–1953), Mao Zedong and the Czechoslovak communist leader Klement Gottwald.<sup>27</sup> After returning home, Minister Kopecký

<sup>27</sup> An interesting background information about the content of these lectures is included in the memoirs of Ladislav Šimovič, the director of the Asian Desk at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who accompanied Václav Kopecký on his official visit to China: »In the visited provincial capitals—Shanghai, Wuhan, Canton—he [i.e. Václav Kopecký] held speeches lasting

gave a lengthy speech entitled »On the Great Country of China and the Life of its People« in Prague on 3 June 1952 which should have solicited support and solidarity with China.<sup>28</sup> Regular mass rallies were held on the occasion of the Chinese National Day in Prague and Bratislava on 1 October.<sup>29</sup>

Another frequently employed narrative strategy is the construction of dichotomies, in both the temporal (past versus present) and spatial senses (here/China versus there/Taiwan). The establishment of the PRC on October 1<sup>30</sup>

for several hours at organized rallies of ‘workers’. These speeches were sentence by sentence translated into Chinese and he, in his characteristic way, lectured the patient and interested Chinese audience (for instance university professors and students in Canton) about Chinese history and culture in a tactless manner from what he remembered and wrote down from the conversations with Prof. Průšek [Jaroslav Průšek, 1906–1980, an eminent sinologist, the founder of Chinese Studies in Czechoslovakia] back home and Dr. Palát [Augustin Palát, 1923–2016, Czech sinologist and diplomat] during the long journey [by train] from Prague to Beijing. The opulent facts were *ex abrupto* enriched by inserted funny stories (often quite distasteful) and jokes which were not comprehensible to the Chinese. These resulted in embarrassment to the audience and sometimes even in displays of disapproval (which was discreetly conveyed to Palát by the Chinese interpreter).—Ladislav Šimovič, »Václav Kopecký, *Listy* [Letters] 41,6 (2011), 32.

- 28 For the text of this lecture, see Kopecký, *Ve veliké čínské zemi*, 11–60. Remarkable information about the unpublished parts of this lecture was given by Ladislav Šimovič: »In the crowded hall of Lucerna in Prague during his lengthy speech about the visit of the government delegation in the PRC, Kopecký, in his characteristic manner, did not forget to insert a revelatory part about the pubic hair of Chinese women! (It was, of course, welcomed by an endless hand-clapping mainly by comrades from [the Prague district of] Žižkov who were commanded to attend the lecture).—Šimovič, »Václav Kopecký«, 32.
- 29 For instance, on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of the founding of the PRC a mass meeting of this kind was held in the Lucerna Palace in Prague on 30 September 1951. The main speaker was Viliam Široký, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and chairman of the Communist Party of Slovakia. This meeting was also reported in the *Filmový týždenník* [Weekly Newsreel] (Nr. 41/1951), and symptomatically entitled »People’s China Guarding the Peace«.
- 30 The establishment of the PRC is described in Chinese as ‘liberation’ (*jiefang* 解放), and the periodization of Modern Chinese history is divided into the eras before and after liberation.

represents in their understanding the pivotal point in China's development, but at the same time it is also invested with global significance, as illustrated by Minister Kopecký's enthusiastic comment: »On the day of the establishment of the People's Republic of China the globe finally inclined to the side of peace, democracy and socialism.<sup>31</sup> The modern history of China is presented in a black-and-white manner: China before 1949 is only portrayed with negative associations, in contrast to the positive developments after the seizure of power by the Chinese Communist Party:

Was the Chinese nation not sleeping as though enchanted for three thousand years? The Chinese people had beautiful palaces, but they had to bow in front of them, they lived in a rich country, but they were starving to death, they had a great, fine culture but they did not understand it. And did they not rouse as if awakened by a magic wand? The Chinese nation revolted and it started to move, to progress. Its talent and wisdom, its labour and force will raise the greatest country in the world up to the sun.<sup>32</sup>

The authors used straightforward language and the 'political enemies' were denoted by very negative labels:

Before the liberation, this area was ruled by landlords. Twenty-two villains possessed almost fifty eight percent of the land. After the liberation the peasants organized themselves into a cooperative; confiscated the land, houses and working tools from the landowners and distributed them among the poor peasants. [...] The living standard of the village is on the rise. There is a granary in the abandoned temple. They dug ten wells.<sup>33</sup>

According to the authors, the living conditions of Chinese people before 1949 were circumscribed by the corruption and incompetence of the Kuomintang 國民黨 regime: »Nobody will have to chew on roots again and during the summer no

<sup>31</sup> Neuman, *Čína a její lid*, 7. Similarly, Deputy Prime Minister Široký at the rally held on the occasion of the foundation of China proclaimed: »The global historical importance of the victory of the great Chinese nation consists of the fact that the People's Republic of China became a mighty bastion of the global camp of peace and socialism under the leadership of the Soviet Union.«—*Filmový týždenník* [Weekly Newsreel], Nr. 41/1951.

<sup>32</sup> Mináč, *V krajině, kde vychodí slnko*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffmeister, *Pohlednice z Číny*, 117–118. Other authors also emphasized: »We will have to often recall the shameful and criminal rule of Kuomintang while describing our trip in China.«—Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květů*, 23.

one will have to pull the dead bodies of children from caves.<sup>34</sup> By contrast to these gloomy images, the developments in the PRC evoke the authors' impassioned admiration: »Ages, you may envy us! We were at the cradle; we were present at the nascence of the happiness of the biggest country in the world!«<sup>35</sup> The dichotomy of past versus present is often emphasized by the examples of individual people, for instance, Vladimír Mináč described the life story of a certain Xuedin, who was not allowed to study before 1949. He suffered from starvation and physical abuse by his employer, but after the foundation of the PRC he became the chief technician in a weaving mill and he expressed his deep gratitude for his personal happiness and living standards to the new regime.<sup>36</sup> The authors laid emphasis on the moral superiority of the new socialist regime in China (and *eo ipso* of the socialist camp as such) in comparison with the past and the capitalist world as well:

With regret I have to announce to those who expected that I will be discussing such things in this book that there are no dens, no brothels, no thieves and murderers, no pirates and smugglers, no woman has to prostitute herself, there are no venereal diseases, one can hear nothing about gangs, criminal brotherhoods or horrible sects. Nowadays in China you can leave your suitcase all day on the street. It might be the case in Stockholm, but it is certain that in China no one would steal it.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Mináč, *Vkrajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 43. Paradoxically, only several years later (1959–1961), the disastrous economic policy of the central Chinese government caused a large-scale famine during which some 30 million people died and cannibalism was quite widespread (children, especially, became victims of this manmade tragedy). For details, see Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Untold Story of Mao's Great Famine* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Mináč, *Vkrajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 117.

<sup>36</sup> Mináč, *Vkrajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 27–28; see also Ferko, *Tajfun je dobrý vietor*, 38–41; Pujmanová, *Čínský úsměv*, 30–31.

<sup>37</sup> Mňáčko, *Ďaleko je do Whampoa*, 180. The Slovak journalist and writer Miloš Krno described North Korea in similar words: »Here, the people are honest, no one would steal anything from you.«—Miloš Krno, *Zkrajiny rannej sviežosti* [From the Country of Morning Freshness] (Bratislava: Osveta, 1960), 25.

The negative example, against which the author juxtaposes the idealized image of the post-1949 China, is represented not only by the pre-1949 developments, but also by the current situation in Taiwan.<sup>38</sup>

Nanjing was until recently the capital of China. That China which was under the reign of the Kuomintang was a jailhouse for millions of people. The Chinese people had been suffering badly for a long time. But nothing lasts forever and this is also true for Chiang Kai-shek and his regime. The People's Liberation Army chased away all the evil-doers and parasites, so they could only escape to Taiwan under the protection of their American masters in order to scold and spit blood from there.<sup>39</sup>

The Czech and Slovak authors perceived Taiwan as the rotten regime of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石, 1887–1975) and the Kuomintang, while at the same time it symbolized American imperialism: »One has to think about the frontier of two worlds, about the American fleet in the Taiwan Strait, about Taiwan armed to the teeth, about the human malevolence and the voracious greediness of money. No, this eastern frontier of our world will not be conquered by anybody.«<sup>40</sup> Taiwan embodies for these authors (and it has to be noted that none of them ever visited the island) the state of moral decline: »General Zhan Shunu, in the same way as hundreds before him, provided a truthful testimony about Taiwan, where a piece of ancient China remained preserved. That corrupt China with hordes of prostitutes, policemen, and American advisors.«<sup>41</sup> A similarly negative image of the criminal and violent nature of Taiwan is mentioned in another travelogue:

<sup>38</sup> After the defeat in the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek and hundreds of thousands of followers of the Kuomintang escaped to Taiwan where the government of the Republic of China (led by the Kuomintang) continued its existence with the military and political support of the United States of America. For details, see Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 504–513.

<sup>39</sup> Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Ferkó, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 46. Prostitutes and Americans also embodied moral decline and political subordination in the description of South Korea by Miloš Krno: »One can hear the footsteps of American military policemen and hookers surrounding them. [...] Namtemun Street is a street of brothels. Here the life of thousands of girls drains away very quickly. These girls did not have any other option: if they did not want to starve to death they could only sell their bodies and their youth to the occupiers.«—Krno, *Z krajiny rannej sviežosti*, 88.

»Around noon a large Kuomintang battlecruiser suddenly appeared in our bay. We could not figure out whether it was intentionally being piloted directly against us, or just making another of their plundering inroads, during which the Kuomintang people robbed the inhabitants of the island and mistreated their women.«<sup>42</sup>

### 3 *China as Seen by Lumír Jisl—Closely Followed by a Gunman*

The diary written for private use and his interest in archaeology and cultural heritage of ancient China enabled Jisl to eschew the stereotyped depiction mentioned above. His travel diary offers not only a partial modification of the official image, but also a profoundly different portrayal of China in late 1950s. As opposed to the Czechoslovak authors who focused on industrialization and wrote eulogies of the iron and steel works in Shenyang<sup>43</sup> or depicted the suffering of the toiling population during Imperial period,<sup>44</sup> Jisl was a well-educated archaeologist and art historian. Therefore, he not only did not perceive the ancient history through the Marxist class perspective, but sometimes even made critical comments about the preservation of cultural heritage in China.<sup>45</sup> During his stay

<sup>42</sup> Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 23. For a more detailed analysis of the schematic depiction of Taiwan in Czechoslovakia during 1950s, see Martin Slobodník, »The Foe from the Island and the Friend from the Mainland—Perception of Two Chinas in Czechoslovakia during the 1950s«, in *Studia orientalia Victori Krupa dedicata*, ed. by Martina Bucková and Anna Rácová (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2016), 223–235.

<sup>43</sup> »Here we are in land of iron. / In the frost its blood is jingling, / the fire is breathing with coal breeze, / here is pulsating the vessel of vessels / of the giant body of China—/ my head is whirling.« —Pujmanová, *Čínský úsměv*, 54.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, Vladimír Mináč when describing the Summer Palace in Beijing, stated: »On the island and also on the top of the hill, on the lake and on the streams, you can see the human sweat and blisters, human poverty and blood. You can see thousands of bamboo sticks, thousands of bare feet, thousands of skinny figures with bold shaved heads, you can hear the screaming of guardians and lashing of their whips...« —Mináč, *V krajině, kde vychodí slnko*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> »The temple is in a despicable condition, now it is turned into a school. Allegedly it is a very

in Beijing he repeatedly visited the Liulichang 琉璃廠 quarter, which is known for the numerous well-stocked antiquity shops. Jisl discovered this part of the city just a couple of days after arriving in Beijing and there he spent a substantial part of his Chinese scholarship. In most of the cities where he went, Jisl's visits started in local museums and his diary clearly shows that he was mainly interested in archaeological sites his Chinese colleagues were excavating,<sup>46</sup> or important cultural relics such as Buddhist caves. Modern China with its rapid socialist reforms was mentioned only marginally in his diary. Even his itinerary was different from the usual trips organized by the Czechoslovak writers and journalists, as it included numerous places which were out of reach of the majority of official guests from friendly countries: e.g., Dunhuang 敦煌, Maijishan 麥積山 or Zhoukoudian 周口店. However, even he was not spared from some compulsory parts of the official program for foreign visitors in China—he participated at the National Day celebrations in Beijing, he had to participate in a tour of a school for Party cadres in Canton, and he was shown a number of Chinese movies of the period with its black-and-white Marxist portrayal of traditional society.

The travel diary is a valuable primary source also because he writes openly about a topic, which was for obvious reasons completely neglected by the authors of the published travelogues—namely the limits of his movement in China, the

venerated and visited place, but looking at its current condition, I would not say that it is in high esteem» (17 November 1957). The critical attitude of Jisl towards the situation of religious institutions in China during 1950s (see also his comments written down on 22 October 1957 when he visited a former temple in Lanzhou 蘭州) contrasts with the anti-religious zeal of the pro-regime authors from the same period. To show the harsh propaganda language of the period, I quote from the travelogue written by Ladislav Mňáčko: »I saw several Buddhist temples in China. They are empty. Almost nobody visits them. [...] What happened? Buddhism has outlived itself. Everybody felt the same that with this faith China will not progress too far. And it is the same with other traditions, customs and habits. They are archaic. They do not match with the age of iron, electricity and atoms. They have outlived themselves.«—Mňáčko, *Ďaleko je do Whampoa*, 183. For more on this topic, see Slobodník, »Temples became silent a long time ago».

<sup>46</sup> Jisl complained about the lack of expertise of his Chinese colleagues during the archaeological excavations: »They are not conducting levelling, during the measurements they do not care about a centimeter of some more. They do not have a diary [of excavation works]. The whole exploration is chaotic« (4 November 1957).

continuous surveillance by Chinese companions and restrictions to take photographs in China.<sup>47</sup> Even though these measures are not explicitly mentioned in the published travelogues, due to the totalitarian character of the Chinese regime in 1950s, one can assume that the stay of all official guests in China was carefully organized and monitored by Chinese hosts and they were not able to move freely around the country or to choose respondents for their interviews.<sup>48</sup> But in Jisl's diary we find a number of detailed descriptions of this *modus operandi*. Just a week after his arrival in China (15 September 1957) he noted: »Seven people follow us. This is the reverse side of Chinese politeness. One is not able to move even a step as one likes. Everybody here is basically like a hostage.«<sup>49</sup> He contrasted this feeling of being in 'captivity' with his experience in Mongolia, where he spent several months before coming to China: »I have to repeatedly recall this liberty and freedom in Mongolia. [...] I do not know, whether I will always be able to control myself in such a way, that I will endure to stay here for two months« (10 October 1957). The mechanism of monitoring the movement of

47 The ban on taking photographs is also mentioned by R. Moric, who was reminded by a policeman that he must not take pictures, but when the policeman found out that the guest came from a friendly socialist country, he allowed him to do it. See Moric, *Pri zakliatej rieke*, 48.

48 The Slovak poet Rudolf Fabry visited China in late 1957 and early 1958. The collection of his travel writings from different parts of the world (published in 1978) includes a short text about China, which he amended by a brief commentary written later (1976). This commentary reflects the official criticism of China after the Sino-Soviet split in early 1960s: »The Chinese foreign policy is currently [i.e. in 1976] the most reactionary, the most anti-Soviet, the most anti-communist in the world.«—Rudolf Fabry, *Tak chutí svet* [This is How the World Tastes] (Bratislava: Obzor, 1978), 346. In this part he also noted, that »in the time, when this reportage was originally written, I would not have dared to state everything openly, as some of the facts were weird and not understandable at that time.«—*Ibid.*, 341. In this amendment he repeatedly described how he travelled through China: »I was followed by the secret police everywhere; even a secret policeman was sitting in the same train compartment with me. [...] They followed my every step and went even to the toilet with me. [...] They monitored us like prisoners.«—*Ibid.*, 342, 345.

49 When quoting from Jisl's diary, I am referring to the corresponding date of the entry in his meanwhile published work. See Jisl, *Čínský deník*.

foreigners in China (despite the fact that they were from friendly socialist countries) included repeated passport checks on railway stations, which Jisl also briefly mentioned. The permanent company of his Chinese guides was perceived by Jisl as a hindrance to his stay in China, and from the diary it is clear that he was frustrated by it:<sup>50</sup> »What is the most annoying thing in China? It is the so-called gunman. He is someone who they always forget to introduce to you, but surprisingly, he follows your every step. [...] One can recognize them because they always walk some five meters behind you and you can see something bulging in their back pocket or under their coat« (7 October 1957). During the stay in Dunhuang Jisl repeatedly mentioned the tasks of his Chinese companions: »The contact with foreigners is based on a system of monitoring. Instead of inviting me to the institute (there is an archaeological institute here) and discussing and speaking with me, they collect all the information through interpreters. They also observe me in addition to the ‘gunman’. My [interpreter] noted down everything that I photographed outside today« (9 October 1957). When Jisl managed to get rid of the undesired company, he wrote down with certain sarcasm: »A miracle happened! There is no gunman with me! I can freely go to the city! Am I really in China?« (22 November 1957). Besides the permanent armed escort, which established a barrier between the visitor and the common people<sup>51</sup>, the planning of the trip required thorough preparation, which should have created an experience that would leave the visitor with only positive impressions:

In the morning we should have visited the bridge [in Wuhan]. [...] As the morning was quite foggy and it would not have been possible to take photographs, I asked to change the schedule. After some haggling the interpreter told me that it was not so easy and

<sup>50</sup> The continuous surveillance by the security apparatus was also mentioned in the memoirs of Soviet experts who were working in China during 1950s. See Deborah Kaple, »Soviet and Chinese Comrades Look Back at the Friendship Decade«, *Modern China Studies* 22,1 (2015), 52, 59–60.

<sup>51</sup> »In the morning the companion together with the gunman (he pretends to be an assistant of the secretary of the academy of sciences in this town) went for breakfast to the Chinese [dining-room]. I thought that I might get closer to the common people so I stated that I would have a Chinese lunch. OK, but: we stayed in the European dining-room and especially for us, they served Chinese dishes there. Because they did not want me to sit with the common people and observe them. Moreover, the space was divided by a long screen. In front of the hotel there stood at least five plain-clothes policemen« (22 October 1957).

probably would be not possible. Why? Because we were scheduled to visit the bridge in the morning. And is it not possible to give them a call that we will arrive at a different time? Yes, it is possible, but is it necessary to make some preparations. [...] Is it not possible to walk across the bridge from one side to the other? When there should be a guided tour it is different, it is necessary to make some preparations. So we should not do the guided tour and we should visit the bridge like normal visitors. That is not possible, because you are a foreigner. And when a foreigner wants to see anything, it is necessary to make arrangements in advance (6 January 1958).<sup>52</sup>

After the Sino-Soviet ideological and political split in 1959–1960, when mutual relations significantly cooled down, the detailed preparation of the trips of Czechoslovak guests is also repeatedly mentioned by Milan Ferko in his unpublished typescript about the journey to China from December 1964.<sup>53</sup>

One can say that our journey was perfectly staged. Everything went according to the schedule, carefully selected people were always at hand, half of the carriage in which we travelled, was empty—in a word, we were treated like a fish in a fishbowl. Therefore we did not meet anybody unexpected, nothing happened which was not arranged ahead, we did not receive any unanticipated information. This is the main difference with the previous years, when our mutual relations resembled a ‘honeymoon’.<sup>54</sup>

However, it has to be stressed, that despite this impression of M. Ferko, the journeys of the Czechoslovak visitors during 1950s were also arranged in a detailed manner (as shown by Jisl’s travel diary). And undoubtedly the same was

<sup>52</sup> The privileged treatment of guests from Czechoslovakia is mentioned also in the paper of Hana Suchá, who interviewed members of the Czechoslovak military art ensemble who were in China in 1952: »The building [of the shopping center] used to be always closed for the general public, so only the members of the Military Art Ensemble were shopping.«—Hana Suchá, »Armádní umělecký soubor Vítá Nejedlého v Čínské lidové republice v roce 1952«, 98.

<sup>53</sup> The Czechoslovak leadership loyally supported the policy of Moscow towards China, for details, see Kolenovská, »Mezi dvěma slunci«.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Slobodník and Viera Lelkesová, »Ako rybky v akváriu”—nepublikovaný strojopis Milana Ferka o ceste do Číny v decembsri 1964« [Like a Fish in a Fishbowl—Unpublished Typescript of Milan Ferko About his Journey to China in December 1964], *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 13,2 (2014), 226. However, this part was not included in the final version of his typescript.

true about the visits of Chinese official guests to Czechoslovakia during 1950s. The Chinese ability to create a ‘Potemkin village’ for foreign visitors (including special shops with commodities which were in short supply for the local citizens and sold to privileged guests for reduced prices, as well as carefully selected respondents for ‘spontaneous’ interviews with ‘common people’) is mentioned also by P. Hollander who quotes from various travelogues written by Western visitors of China.<sup>55</sup>

The long-term stay in the company of Chinese interpreters, whom Jisl correctly perceived as part of the control apparatus and moreover, who were according to him not enough educated and who did not make his journey through China more convenient, resulted in several unflattering utterances in the diary, in which he described them as »dickheads« (6 November 1957), »stupid persons«, »stupid as hell« (30 October 1957), »fools« (14 November 1957) and »idiots« (19 November 1957; similarly 20 November 1957). The relationship between Jisl and his companions and hosts was quite problematic, as they did not always fulfill his expectations and the working schedule they prepared for him was not in accordance with his academic interests. In Jisl’s diary there are several records in which he lamented in despair about the amount of time he had to trifle away due to poor organization (16 September 1957, 21 September 1957). Repeated criticism aimed at his hosts, which can be found in the travel diary, proves that despite his privileged status of a guest from a friendly socialist country he was treated with a certain restraint. These parts of the diary often describe his encounters with the staff of museums and research institutes which he visited—their cold distance and their repeated unwillingness to make arrangements for him might be a result of the fact that the itinerary of Lumír Jisl was quite unusual for foreign visitors and the people who received him were not ‘professional hosts’—namely experienced Party cadres who were in charge of management of relations with friendly foreign countries; but archaeologists, museum workers or historians.<sup>56</sup> During his stay in

55 Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 288–290. Detailed information about the staged and carefully arranged scenarios for the journeys of foreign visitors in China is provided by Robert Loh, who—before his escape from China in 1957—regularly received official guests in Shanghai and enacted the role of a former capitalist who was supporting the new communist regime, see Robert Loh and Humphrey Evans, *Escape from Red China* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1962), 153–165.

56 The fact that they did not have any experience with welcoming foreign guests and probably they

Dunhuang his hosts tried to not to show to him parts of the complex of the famous Buddhist caves (8 October 1957) and the director of the local research institute Chang Shuhong 常書鴻 (1904–1994) repeatedly stated that he is too busy to receive Jisl which—as Jisl soon correctly comprehended due to his accumulated experience from the stay in China<sup>57</sup>—was just a way to show his disinterest in the Czechoslovak guest. The restrained approach was manifested also in the decision to allow Jisl to take only a limited number of photographs in Dunhuang (and similarly in the Longmen 龍門 Buddhist caves in the vicinity of Luoyang 洛陽),<sup>58</sup> which Jisl sarcastically commented: »And vis-à-vis this we give them our whole industrial documentation!« (6 October 1957). Jisl declared his interest to cooperate with Chinese specialists and to jointly write a monograph on the Tibetan Buddhist art from Hangzhou in eastern China, but his plan was dismissed (27 December 1957). Jisl perceived this unwillingness of his Chinese hosts to cooperate and to help very carefully and when his stay in China was approaching its end, he noted down: »From all the previous negotiations with me as well as from the discussions with Xia Nai [夏鼐, 1910–1985, famous Chinese archaeologist and historian] it is

did not receive any precise instructions how to treat the Czechoslovak visitor might have resulted in their ‘preventively dismissive’ attitude. A too accommodating and heartful attitude to a foreigner might have led to criticism from their superiors. Moreover, due to the so-called ‘Anti-Rightist Movement’ (*fan you yundong* 反右運動), the political situation in China during Jisl’s visit in late 1957 and early 1958 was confused and intricate.

<sup>57</sup> »After some experience I already know what it means: ‘Get lost from this place as soon as possible’« (7 November 1957).

<sup>58</sup> At some occasions he was completely banned from taking photographs, for instance in Hangzhou: »I wanted to take a picture from the pagoda, which would include the roofs, a view of the river and a part of the bridge. But the representative from the cultural department did not allow it, as—according to him—it is forbidden. How come—I asked him—when it is possible to buy photographs depicting the pagoda and the bridge exactly like that in the stall under the pagoda? [His] answer: these pictures were taken before the liberation, but now it is not possible. Height was when I returned home, opened an English guidebook and found exactly the same photograph in it. I told the interpreter that it was a clear example of Chinese bureaucratism. But it is even more—it is an example of enormous stupidity« (26 December 1957).

obvious, that although we are guests here, we are unwelcomed and they would be glad to get rid of us« (9 December 1957). This negative impression was only strengthened during his lecture, which was just a formal ritual at the Archaeological Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (his host institution in China) one week before his departure from China (3 February 1958), and it did not fulfill his academic expectations. The fact that the organizers of his trip did not include a visit to the Department of Archaeology at the Peking University resulted in a record in his diary which reflected his frustration at his Chinese colleagues and in which he bluntly summarized his Chinese experience one day before departure (9 February 1958): »A guy from the university raised a question: ‘And have you visited the university in this town?’ ‘No, as nobody invited me.’ Their faces were sour as if they had tasted lemon. He asked really early—well, I have been two months in Beijing. But nothing can make me angry anymore.«

During the trip lasting several months, when he was always accompanied by his hosts, Jisl had to struggle with the ‘Great Chinese Wall’ of too much courteousness and ceremoniality, which built a barrier between him and his companions who at the same time prevented him to permeate beyond the carefully prepared, retouched and idealized image of China. Jisl was well aware of their role and their hypocrisy, therefore shortly before leaving China he critically summed up his experience with Chinese intelligentsia:

And what about these hundreds of millions of poor people? It will last very long until it will be their turn in socialism. One can see that these people are completely honest and they do not pretend anything. Therefore one has to respect them. By contrast to the stratum of the so-called intelligentsia, who to a large degree are in fact only semi-intelligentsia, but they are cocky or erudite in a stupid way, and they have no idea about good manners, a lie is a virtue for them, hypocrisy—that is what Chinese courteousness is called in the world. They utter empty phrases adorned by alleged wisdom from some ancient dynasties (8 February 1957).

Even for the highest Czechoslovak diplomatic representatives in China it was not always easy to overcome the wall of ceremonial courteousness. František Weiskopf (1900–1955), the first Czechoslovak ambassador in the PRC (in office 1950–1952), mentioned his difficulties in an internal report to Vilim Široký, the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs: »I am facing a very polite and soft, nevertheless unpenetrable veil made of cotton-wool. Someone from our part of the world is literally immobilized by the ancient Chinese courteousness in a way

that one feels like Charlie Chaplin walking on a melting asphalt.<sup>59</sup> Similar was the experience of M. Ferko from December 1964: »Every Chinese with whom we spoke was fenced against us by this wall and this veil. And we were never able to overcome it and see what he thought about something, what was his opinion on that issue.«<sup>60</sup> In those cases when a guest was trying to tackle issues which were perceived as too sensitive by his hosts, the Chinese were immediately prepared to channel off the discussion into topics which were not problematic, such as Chinese cuisine and weather.<sup>61</sup>

The private nature of the travel diary, which was not intended for a broader readership enabled Jisl such a degree of criticism, that would have been absolutely unacceptable in the published travelogues of the period. His frustration at the everyday encounters with his Chinese acquaintances is voiced in a very negative diary entry:

Until now I have not dared to make my personal conclusion about the Chinese, as this is a very complicated undertaking. But today I could amend my opinion about them. I was rendered help in this way: I told the interpreter that after lunch I would like to take a stroll through the town without a huge company—only the two of us. Probably he spoke with someone about it, because during lunch he told me that we could not go out. And after a while he added that it was not forbidden by law ('loi')—but it would be impolite—that was to say in case we would nevertheless go out. Which means: 1) Chinese are very egoistic as they force everybody to comply with their wishes and they even tell it to him in a straightforward manner. [...] The only thing in which they are ready to make compromises [to a foreigner] is that they cook European food and give

59 Quoted from Ivana Bakešová, »Na okraj 65. výročí diplomatických styků s ČLR« [On the 65th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Diplomatic Relations with the PRC], *Nový Orient* [New Orient] 70,1 (2015), 60.

60 Slobodník and Lelkesová, »'Ako rybky v akváriu'«, 234.

61 For a good example of this strategy, see the conversation of M. Ferko in the Beijing office of the China Writers Association (*Zhongguo zuojia xiehui* 中國作家協會) during which he repeatedly attempted to bring into discussion some sensitive political issues but his counterparts were always able to divert the discussion into some general topics. See Slobodník and Lelkesová, »'Ako rybky v akváriu'«, 237–240.

them a fork and a knife. But as they want to sleep after lunch, everybody either has to sleep or get bored. 2) Their courteousness is usually just hypocrisy and a façade, which will fade away very swiftly. If they were really so polite, they would not refuse such a small wish as the one presented by me. For them it would just be a sole exception in their whole life, while for me it means adjusting to them during the whole journey [in China]. They forced me into their politeness that is they instructed me what it means to be polite. However, they do not understand that in this way they were very impolite. Their courteous phrases are just empty phrases, nothing more. 3) Therefore their logic could not be logic in a common sense. [...] It seems the transmission of thoughts exists, because exactly at this moment the interpreter came in a triumphant manner—asking me if I would like to go for a short stroll. Probably he was able to see on my face that I was injured [by the refusal] and he pulled a few strings. First I wanted to decline in order to preserve their ‘politesse’, but then I decided that they can kiss my ass and I went out—at least for the remaining forty five minutes. But that did not at all change my opinion (27 November 1957).

Besides this harsh criticism of the people from a friendly socialist country his diary includes some sarcastic comments about building skills of the Chinese (and Soviets as well),<sup>62</sup> as well as a short appraisal of the Chinese policy towards nationalities during 1950s, which was in sharp contrast to the official portrayal of a joyful family of various ethnic groups living in socialist China: »Although the governor of the province is an Uyghur, all the officials are Chinese. Chinese have immediately launched the colonization of Turkestan and they are dispatching one to two thousand people there on a daily basis. Allegedly their plan was to settle there some twenty million Chinese. Recently they have stopped the colonization project. Reportedly there are some four million Uyghurs.« (19 October 1957).<sup>63</sup>

62 »They are building a new city here. It seems they are mainly following the model of the Soviet Union. Doors and windows do not fit tightly, doors are without doorknobs. Houses are without chimneys but from every window a tube from a stove peeps out. There are no doors leading to balconies and one has to jump there through a window« (18 November 1957).

63 The ethnic composition in Xinjiang 新疆 has underwent substantial changes as a result of the policy of the Beijing government and currently the 8.5 millions of Uyghurs living there represent less than half (*ca* 41%) of the people in this autonomous region in Western China. For more on the post-1949 Chinese policy in Xinjiang, see Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang – China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

I want to demonstrate the unique perspective of Jisl's diary through a comparison of his entries with the official travelogues of the Czechoslovak authors. I will focus on three reemerging motives, namely the celebrations of the foundation of the PRC in Beijing, the symbolism of the bridge across the Yangtze River in Wuhan—the emblematic site of the period of construction of socialism in China during 1950s, and finally the representation of Shanghai, the second most important Chinese city.

The National Day celebrations at the Tian'anmen 天安門 Square in Beijing represented an appealing annual state ritual which was inspired by the Soviet parades at the Red Square in Moscow. According to the historian Chang-tai Hunga these parades were:

well-organized political rituals with multiple purposes: they were festivals to highlight the demolition of the old order and to embrace the new socialism; a legitimization of the CCP's authority; a display of myriad achievements under communism; an affirmation of the centrality of the role of Mao Zedong (1893–1976) in modern Chinese revolutionary history (hence expressing the cult of Mao); and an announcement of China's presence in the international socialist camp.<sup>64</sup>

Celebration on 1 October started with an army parade in order to show the military might of the new socialist regime, which during the 1950s made several unsuccessful attempts to conquer Taiwan. Some four hundred thousand people participated at the National Day celebrations in Beijing and this event was carefully planned by numerous organizing committees which prepared a detailed choreography and scenario.<sup>65</sup> The participation at this celebration was perceived both by the Chinese hosts and their foreign guest as the highlight of their stay in the PRC<sup>66</sup> and the tribunes under the Gate of Heavenly Peace were filled with a wide spectrum of representatives from friendly socialist countries and pro-

64 Hung, »Mao's Parades: State Spectacles in China in the 1950s«, 413.

65 For more information about the detailed preparation of these mass rallies, see Hung, »Mao's Parades: State Spectacles in China in the 1950s«, 415–424.

66 One writer concluded his chapter on the Chinese National Day with this sentence: »The most beautiful day of our stay in China is over.«—Ferko, *Tajfín je dobrý vietor*, 102.

communist movements in the West.<sup>67</sup> The fact that the official visits of Western leftist intellectuals were often scheduled during the period of most important official celebrations (1 October, 1 May), when the panegyric parades provided a vivid demonstration of vitality, national unity and might of the newly established state was noted also by Herbert Passin. Paul Hollander mentioned several examples of enthusiastic descriptions written by Western visitors, whose language to a large degree resembled the quotations from the works of Czechoslovak authors listed below.<sup>68</sup> Czechoslovak visitors were familiar with this kind of manifested support for the communist regime from the annual 1 May parades at home,<sup>69</sup> but the gigantic scale of Chinese celebrations left a deep impression on them. They noted the specific features of the Chinese National Day parade: »Yes, this parade was different from parades in Europe. It has a charm of good taste and poetry. Carefully selected harmony of colours and an order in the shifting of mass formations.«<sup>70</sup> In the early 1950s Czechoslovak visitors were able to locate a familiar face of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia: »From the portraits carried at in the parade often the dear face of comrade Gottwald looks at us.«<sup>71</sup> All the Czechoslovak authors in great detail described the participation of various classes of the society (soldiers, peasants, workers, young pioneers, members of ethnic minorities as well as representatives of the religious traditions tolerated by state authorities) in the

67 »We are standing—together with Mexicans, Indonesians, Burmans, and Sudanese Africans—on the left side of the tribune reserved for guests.—Ferko, *Tajfun je dobrý vietor*, 100. »The whole world has come together at the tribune reserved for guests. Who would be able to count them? Numerous and various nations from Europe, Africa, America: every nation has dispatched its best delegates to participate in the celebration of Chinese people.«—Mináč, *V krajině, kde vychodí slnko*, 13.

68 Herbert Passin, *China's Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1963) 4; Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 314.

69 For 1 May parades in socialist Czechoslovakia, see Roman Krakovský, *Rituel du 1er mai en Tchécoslovaquie, 1948–1989* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

70 Hoffmeister, *Pohlednice z Číny*, 59.

71 Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 157; similarly Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květů*, 152; Majerová, *Zpívající Čína* [Singing China] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1954), 217.

parade.<sup>72</sup> The enthusiastic atmosphere of the parades lured the communist writers from Czechoslovakia into pathetic formulations: »Today is a day of happiness, the day of the third anniversary of the epochal victory.«<sup>73</sup> The joy from the triumph of the socialist regime at the beginning of new era of Chinese history after 1 October 1949 was noted by V. Mináč: »The Chinese nation is walking and one has to think about a miracle. As it is a miracle and to a certain degree it resembles the fairy tale about the sleeping beauty.«<sup>74</sup> The huge crowd of several hundred thousand participants, who walked through the square usually from 10 AM until 2 PM symbolized the energy and the revolutionary zeal of the citizens of the PRC: »The Chinese parade on the National Day resembles the bubbling Yangtze River. It is a storm of enthusiasm.«<sup>75</sup> The National Day usually represented for the Czechoslovak visitors the sole opportunity to catch a glimpse of Mao Zedong and other Party leaders standing on the main tribune on the Tian'anmen Square or during the state reception: »And from the Gate of Heavenly Peace a simple man walks out with a grey shirt, a simple Chinese with a smooth high forehead, with little wrinkles around his eyes and with a serious and peaceful smile. Here comes Mao Zedong, the greatest son of Chinese nation.«<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For the descriptions of the National Day in published travelogues, see Čech, Jasný and Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 150–154; Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 150–158; Majerová, *Zpívající Čína*, 215–219; Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 11–14; Hoffmeister *Poblednice z Číny*, 57–61; Ferko, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 99–102.

<sup>73</sup> Čech, Jasný a Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květu*, 150.

<sup>74</sup> Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ferko, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 101.

<sup>76</sup> Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 13. V. Ferko similarly wrote about the state banquet: »And in this moment, ‘our chairman’, comrade Mao Zedong together with Zhou Enlai, fresh, healthy and with a broad smile, walks towards us, completely exhausted after the whole day.«—Ferko, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 102. On the other hand, M. Ferko in late 1964, when Mao Zedong was sharply criticized by Moscow (and Prague) described with a certain irony the emerging cult of Mao in China: »And high above all of this, Chairman Mao Zedong (not as a real person, but more resembling a legendary person) surmounts everything. Museums serve as illustrations of his thoughts and statements, every parade starts with his portrait or sculpture, every official speech is

In comparison with these official poetic and ornate depictions of National Day celebrations in the published travelogues,<sup>77</sup> Jisl in his diary provided a more sober description in which he in his characteristic way rendered a short account of the state reception where he was invited: »In the evening a bacchanal orgy with Zhou Enlai 周恩來 in the company of three thousand people« (30 September 1957). His diary includes a short note on the preparation of the parade: »At midnight I

concluded by an apotheosis of him. And meanwhile this Mao Zedong swims across a river every year or does something very undivine. Or is it actually divine?«—Slobodník and Lelkesová, »Ako rybky v akváriu«, 263–264.

- <sup>77</sup> The extensive descriptions of the National Day parades were featured also in the travelogues published by other authors from socialist countries. To give just one example, I quote from the travelogue of the Hungarian historian László Salgó who visited China in October 1958: »I could hardly turn my eyes away from the parade which struck me by its diversity, its blinding richness of colours and the boundless enthusiasm. The undulant sea on the square supplemented the Babel confusion of tongues of the representatives from seventy countries who were sitting on the tribunes—Indian people with turbans, stiff Indonesian dressed in black, Arabs in white garments and black Africans, Latin American lawyers and sincere friends coming from Western Europe as well as the suspicious gazes of the critics from Western journals. Loud screams and silent astonishing whispers accompanied the proceeding machines and maquettes of agricultural corps, the most modern motorcars and tractors, colourful groups of gymnasts and theatre companies gathered on cars—all of them were celebrating the ‘Great Leap’ of the agriculture, industry and cultural life in 1958.«—Laszló Salgó, *Kína közelről* [China from a Narrow Distance] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1959), 31. This quotation illustrates the fact that there are many similarities and analogies between the official depiction of China in Czechoslovakia in 1950s and other ‘people’s democracies’, which would deserve a broader comparative research. See also below the description of the bridge in Wuhan by a different Hungarian author and quotations from the travelogue of the Soviet writer Boris Polevoy. On the perception of China in Hungarian travelogues, see Martin Slobodník and Viera Lelkesová, »Obraz Číny v maďarských cestopisoch z 50. rokov 20. storočia« [Perception of China in Hungarian Travelogues from 1950s], *Nova Posoniensis* 5 (2015), 109–125. On the perception of China in Poland and the German Democratic Republic in this period, see David G. Tompkins, »The East is Red? Images of China in East Germany and Poland through the Sino-Soviet Split«, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 62,3 (2013), 393–424; Joachim Krüger, »Das China-Bild in der DDR der 50er Jahre«, *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 25 (2001), 257–273.

was woken up by terrible noise down on the street. I rushed to see what was going on—it was the final rehearsal of the parade. Thirty- two drummers were beating eight huge drums, which were two meters in diameter, some hundred more with cymbals; an awful scene. With all this noise around they were forming echelons for the parade» (28 September 1957). As far as the National Day celebration is concerned, Jisl wrote down a few lines where he stressed the theatricality of this event:

Already at five in the morning I woke up due to the noise coming from the street. Soldiers were already standing there and crowds were pouring to the parade. At nine o'clock we were driven in cars to the backside of Imperial palace and this way we were brought to the tribune. I, together with Poucha and Šteffl, was standing on the left tribune. At ten o'clock Mao Zedong and members of delegations arrived. National anthems. Gun salute. Speeches, military parade, afterwards the procession. Masses of people, banners, small balloons with attached inscriptions on ribbons, hundreds of released pigeons, maquettes of airplanes. Allegorical cars. Minorities. Showy conclusion by circus performers, theaters and gymnastic associations. After the parade is over Mao Zedong comes to greet members of various delegations. The end before 1:30 PM. The flags of friendly countries cannot be seen anywhere. Stalin also among the [portraits of the] statesmen. Manifestation just for the tribune, surrounding streets closed down by the police. Imperial palace closed in the afternoon. In the evening a huge firework in three acts and a lot of dancing on streets until late evening (1 October 1957).<sup>78</sup>

A certain ironic detachment in the description of a huge mass rally on the Tian'anmen Square in Beijing was included also in the unpublished text by M. Ferkó, who in December 1964 participated in a parade of Chinese people in support of the communist movement (influenced by Maoism) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and against the U.S. involvement in this conflict:

<sup>78</sup> The Chinese leadership and general public refused the sharp criticism of Nikita S. Khrushchev (1894–1971) aimed against J. V. Stalin and Stalin's portraits were decorating the walls of governmental offices and public buildings even after the year 1956 and they were paraded during the National Day and other public rallies. See Kaple, »Soviet and Chinese Comrades Look Back at the Friendship Decade«, 62–63.

Therefore we were really lucky that we could see him [Mao Zedong] live on the tribune in Beijing, where he was standing face to face with a cheering crowd of some seven hundred and fifty thousand people. The crowds started to gather at the Tian'anmen early in the morning and they carried on with rhythmically shouting and roaring slogans until noon. And the following three days whole China was marching through the streets with banners and yelling anti-imperialist slogans. When it lasted for such a long time, we dared to comment on it: 'In our country the workers donate part of their salary or some other financial resources as an actual contribution to the revolution instead of parading through streets...' 'Our protest marches are the fire which will spark off the revolution in the whole world,' they answered.<sup>79</sup>

79 Slobodník and Lelkesová, »'Ako rybky v akváriu'«, 264.



Plate 3

*National Day celebration at the Tian'anmen Square, 1 October 1957 (photography: Lumír Jisl).*

The Wuhan double-deck rail and road bridge became one of the emblematic symbols of the industrialization of 'New China' (it was depicted also on the banknotes), an example of the engineering skills of Chinese experts and at the same time a monument of the Sino-Soviet cooperation as many Soviet specialists



Plate 4

*One of the two pictures which Jisl took when visiting the bridge in Wuban (photography: Lumír Jisl).*

contributed to its building. The Wuhan Bridge across the Yangtze River was finished in September 1957. It started to operate on 15 October 1957 (nearly three

months before Jisl's arrival there) and it represented a strategic transportation line between north and south of China. From the perspective of Jisl's Chinese companion, this bridge was perceived as one of the highlights of his trip across China and already one week before arrival in Wuhan he was discussing with Jisl about the shooting of the bridge: »And he reminded me to reserve some photographic films, because according to him one would not be enough« (26 December 1957). Jisl's diary entry should be understood within the context of Chinese administrative restrictions, which did not enable him to take as many pictures as he wished to of those cultural relics, which were at the center of his professional interest. Also during the visit to Wuhan, Jisl first went to temples and museum, but he could not evade the tour of the bridge, which he summed up briefly with certain sarcasm:

[The bridge] is more than six hundred meters long; on the upper deck there is a road with pavements and below it two railway lines. It was built by three thousand workers. There are large reception halls and four lifts in the towers. It has only eight pillars. There are soldiers and policemen [on the bridge] and on the hill an anti-aircraft army unit. I received a badge accompanied by a long phrase. The bridge is big, but to bring here non-Chinese people specifically to tour it, that is a bit too much. (6 January 1958). Although his Chinese companion would be not satisfied, Jisl 'sacrificed' only two pictures for the bridge.

On the contrary, in the published travelogues we can find much more pathetic description of the Wuhan Bridge. R. Moric was travelling by train across the Yangtze River shortly before the bridge was finished, but he enthusiastically noted: »High above the turbulent stream two ambitious constructions of the iron bridge rise into the sky. They are reaching up their hands as if they would like to embrace themselves as soon as possible. The bridge is monumental. [...] It is a majestic creation made of steel! More than forty thousand workers are building the bridge and they fill the hearts of all the Chinese with pride.<sup>80</sup> Vladimír Ferkó, who visited the bridge just a short time after its completion, dedicated a whole chapter to it and he briefly mentioned some doubts of the local population (his Chinese companions must have supplied him with this information):

80 Moric, *Pri zakliatej rieke*, 42–43.

Many malevolent people here in Whuan were jesting about this project, which was displayed in a show window, many gibes and evil-minded jokes were circulating among people with the lack of faith. Imperial dynasties that managed to build the Great Wall were not able to construct a bridge across the Yangtze. How could this task be completed by a government, which came to power just a couple of years ago? And how the attitude of this small-minded people has changed! The growing bridge has linked their hearts with the heart of the republic!<sup>81</sup>

The Hungarian author Tibor Toncz utilized the Wuhan Bridge as an example of the huge potential of new socialist China in contrast to the era before the 'liberation' in 1949: »The forgotten world of the past managed only to plan [the bridge], but the central people's government put it into concrete form. After some technical measurements the large work started with the building of pillars. And by 1958 it will be completed.«<sup>82</sup> Even Pavel Poucha, who similarly like Jisl, preferred to visit sites connected with the Chinese cultural heritage, described the bridge as »the new wonder of the world« which became a »pilgrimage site of the new socialist engineering«.<sup>83</sup> The opening ceremony of the Wuhan Bridge was featured in the Czechoslovak newsreel; in which the narrator stated: »The age-old dream has turned into reality by avowed construction workers.«<sup>84</sup> The prominent Soviet writer Boris N. Polevoy (1908–1981) who visited China in October and November 1956 wrote a whole chapter about the uncompleted bridge in which he ascribed to it almost mythical features of an entry passage leading towards the bright future:

We were listening to the story about the construction project on the Yangtze River, but all the time I had the feeling that we are listening to a story about industrialization of China, a story about a large country with an ancient culture which lay for centuries in a heavy sleep, chained down by the imperialists on its hands and legs which now awakened due to a thunderstorm of freedom. I had the feeling that I am listening to a story about the Chinese nation which, with the help of socialist brethren, straightened its heroic shoulders, it became aware of its

81 Ferkó, *Tajfún je dobrý vietor*, 77.

82 Tibor Toncz, *Hat hétköznapi Kínában* [Six Weeks in China] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1956) 32.

83 Poucha, *Do nitrá Ásie*, 275.

84 *Týždeň vo filme* [Weekly Newsreel], Nr. 28/1957. Similarly, the bridge in Nanjing 南京, which was built in 1968, was described by Western visitors as a »shrine«, see Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 316.

unbelievable might, it became aware of the power of its bright mind; and it catches up very quickly with everything that has been missed and with an unbelievable eagerness it receives everything best and progressive from foreign technology.<sup>85</sup>

Lumír Jisl spent only three days in Shanghai in December 1957. The sites he visited reflected his interest in the history in Shanghai as well: museums, several pagodas and temples and obligatory antique shops. The modern history of Shanghai and recently constructed buildings were outside the scope of his interest. However, he noticed the hostile attitude of the Shanghai people towards foreigners, which was a reminder of the colonial past: »I believe that here lies the hotbed of Chinese hatred towards all the white people and the hotbed of the most Chinese chauvinism and racism« (23 December 1957).<sup>86</sup> For the pro-regime Czechoslovak writers, Shanghai embodied both the negative heritage of the imperialist influence before 1949, and the dynamic development of Chinese cities after the foundation of the PRC as well. This contrasting depiction can be illustrated by the poem »Shanghai from the Twenty-Second Floor« written by M. Pujmanová: »This city has a double entity, / one is old, cold, / evil landlady of the skyscrapers / who ignores the human. / This city has a double soul, / and I understand the young one much more closely.<sup>87</sup> This city was perceived by the Czechoslovak communist writers as a symbol of all the maladies of the past Western colonial influence: »Shanghai is not anymore the capital of imperialism in China. [...] For a long time it is not anymore a city of banks, brothels, burglars and fancily dressed French officers,

85 Boris N. Polevoj, 30 000 *Li po Číně* [30 000 Li through China] (Prague: Svět sovětu, 1960), 225.

When Boris Nikolayevich Polevoy visited China in December 1964, the Chinese hosts attempted to hide his presence in Beijing from Milan Ferko and they did not allow Ferko to meet with Polevoy, see Slobodník and Lelkesová, »Ako rybky v akváriu«, 270–271.

86 The then anti-foreign sentiments which targeted friendly socialist nations were noted by Jisl: »The engineer T. told me that during a football match between China and Hungary a group of Czechs was supporting the Hungarians. After the match they were attacked by Chinese and they were beaten (together with an Indian who was with them just by coincidence). Only the police was able to rescue them. If the police had not come, they would have been completely lynched as the crowd was screaming: ‘Crucify them, crucify them’« (7 October 1957).

87 Pujmanová, *Čínský úsměv*, 35.

bloody fights and mysterious murders. For a long time Shanghai is not anymore the capitalist metropolitan swamp.<sup>88</sup> Similarly F. Skála remarked: »So long as the U.S. business companies enjoyed unrestricted power in China, Shanghai was indeed a Chinese Chicago with all the accessories, namely gangster gangs and wild nightlife.<sup>89</sup> However, after the foundation of the PRC Shanghai could link up with the seeds of the communist movement, which was established there in early 1920s, and trade unions: »The history of the concessions in Shanghai is a history of robbery and murder. The history of the proletariat in Shanghai is a history of people, who have cherished in their hearts the great thought and great love and who were struggling and dying for it.<sup>90</sup> »Shanghai is the capital of the class struggle.<sup>91</sup> The tour in Shanghai included an obligatory visit to the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party which was founded there in July 1921.<sup>92</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion—Big Bacchanal Orgy in Times of Poverty

The travel diary of Lumír Jisl was published almost sixty years after his visit to China, but he could—before his trip to China—read several of the published travelogues written by Czech and Slovak authors. Two days before the departure from Beijing he confronted his own experience with the perception of China in the published travelogues of the period:

In the afternoon I took a walk in the living quarters of the poor people. In my whole life I have never seen such poverty as I encountered here—not only in Beijing, but anywhere [in China] where I went—during the last five months. These people are just struggling to survive. And one has to say their living standards are higher than before

88 Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 70.

89 Skála, *Čína ve skizzáři*, 79. Boris Polevoy similarly perceived the past of Shanghai: »When the foreign imperialism seized Shanghai, it introduced all its wickedness there.« According to B. Polevoy the negative aspects of the foreign presence included even the tram lines and electrical wires which looked like an »octopus« to him.—Polevoj, *30 000 lí po Číně*, 264–265.

90 Mináč, *V krajine, kde vychodí slnko*, 73.

91 Hoffmeister, *Pohlednice z Číny*, 138.

92 Čech, Jasný a Kachyňa, *Byli jsme v zemi květů*, 55.

the liberation. [...] But who will be the first to write about this? As a matter of fact the life of the white people is happening at the Wangfujing 王府井 [shopping street in the center of Beijing]. The official guests, such as Hoffmeister, Majerová, etc. just frequent one bacchanal banquet after another. What do they know about the real, genuine China with its hundreds of millions of people? (8 February 1958).

Lumír Jisl described in his diary the omnipresent poverty in the PRC, which the official travelogues mentioned only in association with the pre-1949 China. Jisl blamed Adolf Hoffmeister, Marie Pujmanová and all the other official guests in general, that they spent much of their time at official banquets, but his own diary bears testimony to the fact that he also participated in numerous bacchanal feasts with Party secretaries, mayors and local political leaders, where delicacies of local cuisine, which were absolutely unavailable for common Chinese during that period, were regularly served.<sup>93</sup>

The stay of Lumír Jisl in China was also a part of the smoothly functioning system of organized trips for official guests from friendly socialist countries. His privileged status might be illustrated by brief notes about the financial resources disbursed to him by Chinese hosts. According to official Chinese media, the average income of a worker at that time was 65,50 yuan (20 October 1957). Jisl originally received a monthly scholarship of 220 yuan (9 September 1957), which was later—after a decision of Czechoslovak authorities—cut down to 165 yuan. It was, however, still 100 yuan more than the average salary of a worker.<sup>94</sup> Moreover: »Further I found out that I can claim an additional allowance for tropical equipment, that is in my case five per diems à 23,50 yuan, together 117,50 yuan« (5 December 1957). This daily additional allowance for Jisl's stay in southern China was equal to a third of the salaries of Chinese workers. On the other hand Jisl's monthly scholarship was lower than the salaries of Czechoslovak experts

93 The protocolar level of several of these meeting was criticized by Jisl: »I am aware of the fact that the events in my honour were always organized only by people from museums and cultural departments, that is to say institutions which were less appropriate to take care of me, and not the archaeological institute. Not in Xi'an, nor in Luoyang and even less in Beijing« (27 December 1958).

94 Moreover, all the travel costs (transportation, accommodation) were covered by the Chinese side.

working in China: »Palát told me that all scientific and cultural workers are mere poor devils in comparison to any mechanician« (5 December 1957).<sup>95</sup> The special status of Lumír Jisl as the official guest of the Archaeological Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences may also be documented by the rich official programme (movie performances, Beijing opera shows) or by his participation at an evening party of foreign experts on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Xi'an (6 November 1957).

The private nature of the travel diary enabled Jisl the ‘luxury’ of reflecting critically on the negative aspects of China. Contrary to the authors of the officially published travelogues, he did not have to systematically avoid those facts, which would have disrupted the propagandistic portrayal of a friendly communist country. Due to this liberty, the diary of Lumír Jisl represents a rich and informative source for the early period of the construction of socialism in the PRC and draws the interest of researchers to other similar sources from this period.

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95 The average salary of Soviet technical experts in the PRC during 1950s was about 530 yuan. For more about the Soviet experts in China (including their financial situation), see Kaple, »Soviet and Chinese Comrades Look Back at the Friendship Decade«; Shen Zhihua 沈志華, *Sulian zhuanjia zai Zhongguo* 蘇聯專家在中國 [Soviet Experts in China] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015), 178–186.