

Polish Sinology – Reflection Paper¹

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Abstract

This highly individual study is the first-ever attempt to describe Polish Sinology, Polish Sinologists and their individual choices, both vocational and social or political. The author, as an insider, uses interviews with some of the most important representatives of Polish Sinology (mainly of the older generation). He proposes individual systematization, fragmenting the history of the “real socialism” era (1950-1989) and after the democratic breakthrough of 1989 in many chapters, consisting of both collective and individual. Among the major findings is that the initial small circle of highly specialized individuals has recently been quickly growing, and so has the diversification within it. While until 1989 the career choices in this field were limited, basically an official (diplomatic or state bureaucratic) career was the only option, but after this threshold many new windows of opportunities were opened, which included for example personal choices like studying in Mainland China or Taiwan,, opening a business there, creating a website or even opening up a study center.

Keywords: Poland, Sinology, Chinese Studies, China, People of Sinology, Curriculum, Comparative Study

1. Introduction

‘Homeland is my destiny’, says the popular wisdom. The same can be said on the issue of mother tongue, with some exceptions of minorities or those individuals – really few until the recent era of globalization – born or educated in their youth on foreign territories. Only recently, due to the new phenomenon of compression of territory and time, described by sociologist Manuel Castells as ‘network society’, in the last three decades or so, the number of people commuting and surfing through borders, continents and cultures is constantly – and quickly – growing.

¹ The author would like to express here his deep gratitude to Marcin Jacoby of the University of Warsaw for sharing his experience, knowledge, and especially for allowing his interviews with some major individuals of Polish Sinology from recent decades to be used in this research effort, which led – hopefully – to a further enrichment of this study.

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China, as everyone knows, is a world in itself, with her unique language and scripture, calligraphy and painting, in fact all her rich cultural heritage where the presence of the past is constantly felt. A serious treatment of the Middle Kingdom by any foreigner requires life-long devotion, not only blind repetition of the homeland experience, wherever or whatever that is. Thus, in the Chinese context, the notes of the distinguished scholar Simon Leys (Pierre Ryckmans), a true Renaissance man of the globalization era (a Belgian living in Australia), are of special value, even if severe in content. He wrote: ‘no scholar can escape his original condition: his own national, cultural, political and social prejudices are bound to be reflected in his work’. (Leys, 1987, 95) This observation should be popular knowledge and a real starting point for all China-watchers around the world. Like it or not, most of them treat China, due to her uniqueness, as a ‘special animal’, which, for personal reasons or background, they like or dislike, hate or love, almost never being neutral or objective, judging her from their – and not the Chinese – perspective, which is usually (very) different from ours. This initial observation seems to have much value also in the case of Polish studies of China.

Another sharp initial statement by Simon Leys is also relevant. According to him: ‘The intellectual and physical boundaries of the Chinese world are sharply defined; they encompass a reality that is so autonomous and singular that no Sinologist in his right mind would ever dream of extending any Sinological statement to the non-Chinese world’. (Leys, 2013, 361) In other words, China is always special, not to be compared easily with anyone else.

2. Turning points in Polish recent history

Since 1944, when the Soviet Army encroached upon its territory, Poland became a part of the Eastern Block. This was a very peculiar experience, as even during the – fortunately short – Stalinist Era (1949-53) the Poles were constantly watching the West, while remaining a part of the East. Ideologically and politically Poland was a so-called communist country, while culturally and mentally it always wanted to be a part of the West.

Yes, Josif W. Stalin was right when he famously declared that ‘giving communism to Poles is like saddling a cow’. From this ambiguity arose the constant tension which led to frequent eruptions of social or political turmoil and upheaval, unprecedented in the whole Eastern Block, seeing that they took place (counting only the major ones) in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980-81.

Two of them had real fault-line value. In the autumn of 1956 Poland set the example for Hungary, and in both countries there was an anti-communist uprising. Hungary, as we know, was unfortunately engulfed in blood, while Poland –

probably due to her recent, harsh and painful memory of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 – emerged from this turning point as a country unique in the Eastern Block.³ Afterwards, with an individual agricultural sector, an almost independent Catholic Church, it comparatively became the most liberal country of the Eastern Block, its ‘most joyful barrack’, according to the then popular saying – however, in the 1970’s it was surpassed by Hungary under J6nos K6d6r.

This specific background led to – both – the election of the Polish Pope John Paul II in the autumn of 1978 and later, in August 1980 to the world famous Solidarity Movement, which – as is already widely known – was an experience (of freedom) long enough (until the martial law declared on 13 December 1981) to be one of the major forces that undermined both the Soviet regime and communism as an ideological force (the fateful ‘Gorbachev factor’ came a few years later). Both of them, the domestic reforms of glasnost’ and perestroika of the Gorbachev era in the USSR and the resurrection of the Solidarity Movement (not only as a trade union anymore) in Poland led to the annus mirabilis of 1989 and the final collapse of first the Berlin Wall and soon after the whole Communist Block.

The Polish Dream – and also the Czech, Slovak, or Hungarian ones, as we know for instance from a famous essay by Milan Kundera (1984) – of being part of the Western world finally came true. A new democratic era had started, but, of course, on the corpse of real socialism. This led to a socially painful, politically and economically difficult transition and transformation, an all-dimensional – political, mental and economic – departure from ‘real socialism’. This process was once famously described in the following joke: Introducing communism was like preparing fish soup from a living fish, while saying farewell to communism and returning to democracy was nothing but an attempt to prepare a fish – from a fish soup. However, the popular Polish definition of communism, that it was nothing else than a long and winding road from capitalism to capitalism, was also true. Finally we had what we really wanted.

3. Polish Sinology – the Chapters

This following short introduction to modern Polish history is absolutely crucial to understand the history of Polish Sinology, established – but still weak –

³ On the role of China, and Mao Zedong himself in this Polish Autumn: Jan Rowiński ‘ChRL a wydarzenia październikowe w Polsce. Czy Chińczycy uchronili nasz kraj przed radziecką interwencją?’ (PRC and Polish October of 1956. Did the Chinese save our country from Soviet intervention?’), In: Bogdan Gyralczyk (ed.), *Polska-Chiny. Wczoraj, dziś, jutro* (Poland-China: Yesterday-today-tomorrow), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, 239-289. This is a volume published on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations, including the research of the best Polish scholars of China.

prior to World War II, but which came to a full blossom only after the war, as we shall see, and had a lot to do with the communist experience.

For this reason, a description of Polish Sinology in smaller chapters is required. What could be surprising to many is that these Chapters are not exactly the same as the ‘historical thresholds’ mentioned above. In this highly individual, even ‘voluntary’, if one may say so, attempt which was not yet tried by anyone, let me propose the following fragmentation of the history of Polish Sinology until now (the names below are also of my own invention).

3.1. The Great Wave (1950-57)

As is known, Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949. Poland was among the first to establish diplomatic relations with the new, communist regime, doing that already on 7 October.⁴ At the time it seemed that both countries – for the first time in history – were not only friends, but also political allies.

One of the obvious results of this strategic choice, for both sides, was an initiation of real Chinese studies in Poland and the inauguration of bilateral exchange programs⁵. The first group of 9 politically selected young people from Poland went to China to study in her academic institutions in September 1950, starting, like all the others, from a language training at Qinghua University.⁶ In March 1951 the second group was composed, while the third – the largest ever – group of 12 went to China in November 1953. According to meticulous research by a member of this group –later an ambassador of Poland to the PRC, Zdzisław Gyralczyk— altogether in the years 1950-55 there were five groups of Polish youngsters sent to China.⁷ Among them were many future major personalities of bilateral relations in both the academic and political sense, including future ambassadors to China (Ksawery Burski and Z. Gyralczyk), important diplomats (Bogusław Zakrzewski, ambassador to Thailand, Portugal and Brazil) or scholars (like Jan Rowiński (the fourth group) or Roman Sławiński (the second group)).

This was an unforeseen experiment. For the first time in history Poland had a group of people fully educated in China, with enormous personal experience and in-depth knowledge of China, its people, culture and civilization. It comes as no surprise, that it was a deep well or source to be exploited for decades to come, and as we shall see even until today.

⁴ See more in volume: B. Gyralczyk (ed.), *Polska-Chiny...*

⁵ As it was openly stated in the first mutual Agreement on Cultural Exchange, signed in Warsaw on 3 April, 1951.

⁶ B. Dąbrowski in an interview with M. Jacoby.

⁷ Z. Gyralczyk in an interview with M. Jacoby.

3.2. A Cautious Friendship (1958-66)

The autumn of 1956, so flaring and volatile in Hungary and Poland, combined with the initiation of Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward policy led to major political changes on both sides. For instance, the famous Polish historical essayist and writer Paweł Jasionica managed to write his unique and important travel report from China only due to the fact that he went there in late 1956 when China was not in the turmoil of the anti-rightist (as a result of the earlier 'one hundred flowers' liberalization) rectification campaign yet. Meanwhile, Polish freedom immediately after the thaw of October 1956 allowed to publish a honest description of a partner so exotic and unknown to the public. A few months later, for domestic reasons on both sides, such an undertaking would be absolutely impossible (thus the volume waited for its second edition until 2008). (Jasionica, 2008)

The political situation in China and the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and political split both had an immediate negative impact on the exchange programs that had been so fruitful until 1956. Thus, in the next decade, until the eruption of the Cultural Revolution cataclysm there were no more major groups of Polish students going to the PRC. From China's more and more orthodox Maoist perspective, Poland, quasi-liberal and more open to the West, was already suspicious and soon to become 'revisionist'. While for Polish authorities, still strictly following Moscow's orders, especially in the international arena, China also became a 'revisionist state', an outcast from the unified ideological course of the Soviet Block.

The exchange, however, was continued, although with troubles and problems of a different nature (mainly arising from the different internal political situations in both countries). During this time the exchange was more or less based on individual agreements, with just one or two students carefully selected and sent. In this decade (1956-1966) another group of personalities important for the bilateral relations went to China, among them future diplomats, like Stanisław Pawełczyk, Agnieszka Łobacz, or scholars like Mieczysław J. Kłnstler, Tadeusz Żbikowski and Krzysztof Gawlikowski, who was the last Polish student sent in late 1964 and had to interrupt his studies due to the upheaval in the Chinese academic world.

3.3. The Great Vacuum (1966-1982)

The Cultural Revolution (1966-76) created a Great Vacuum in bilateral relations, including all exchange programs. What is more, Poland, which just after the Autumn of 1956 was trying for some time (until the late 1950's) to be at least partly independent from the course imposed by the USSR and the Soviet Communist Party, in the end returned, on the political and ideological front, to the line of 'honest followers' of Moscow's course. This of course included a strong and constantly growing anti-Maoist course.

The political atmosphere did not allow for the continuation of not only exchange programs, but also of earlier initiatives, like for instance the monthly ‘Chiny’ (China), established in the early 1960’s and spreading knowledge especially on Chinese culture and literature. This kind of initiative was not taken up again. The official Polish-Chinese Friendship Society was not promoted either, even though its club on Senatorska Street in Warsaw was for years almost the only place (the other one was the ‘Shanghai’ restaurant) where one had an opportunity to eat some dishes of Chinese cuisine. China again became a faraway, exotic country.

The official line of Polish authorities then was to condemn ‘Chinese revisionists’. It was the era of the publishing of many pieces of Soviet literature on China. Of highly different value, one must add, but all of them ideologically biased and strongly anti-Chinese.⁸ It was the era of the origin and creation of many anti-Chinese prejudices and stereotypes (a poor country where everyone wears uniforms, etc.).⁹ The knowledge of China, that had been growing constantly in the years 1950-1966, was almost not available in the Polish media, which was always condemning China and representing strong ideological fervour and zeal. China disappeared from the Polish public discourse, and the best Polish specialists, among them those educated earlier in PRC, were either silent (the Sinology faculty of Warsaw University, the only in the country then, under the leadership of M. K̄nstler, by definition did not attempt to study modern China, i.e. after 1919), or not visible (Jan Rowiński in Polish Institute of International Affairs was trying to do something under nickname Andrzej Halimarski).¹⁰

The death of Mao Zedong changed almost nothing, because – as we know – since the breakthrough of the early 1970s and US President Richard Nixon’s visit to China, Beijing even more strongly condemned ‘Soviet revisionism’. And this course was continued after the establishment of diplomatic relations with the US in 1979 and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan almost at the same time.

⁸ All these ‘products’ were ideologically biased and must be treated as outdated now. However, one should note at least two volumes of some value. Both were produced by the Soviet Academy of Sciences: *Najnowsza Historia Chin 1917-1976* (The Newest History of China 1917-1976), M. I. Składkowskij (ed.) Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1976, and *Historia nowożytna Chin* (Modern History of China), S. L. Tichwinskij (ed.), Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1979. The latter volume is covering the era from the Opium Wars until the May 4th Movement of 1919.

⁹ An interesting phenomenon was observed: Chinese Communist realities were treated harshly, partly to.... condemn the domestic situation, or to show the similarities, e.g. Stanisław Głabiński, *Mao i inni* (Mao and others), Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1974. Another author, B. Gyralczyk exercised this approach fruitfully in the Cracow intellectual monthly *Zdanie* (The Opinion) throughout the 1980’s.

¹⁰ It is a great achievement of Polish Sinology that a group of people under his guidance has published, four volumes of documents from the Cultural Revolution era, which were ‘for internal use only’ (the final, additional one, was published during of political thaw in the year 1980, when Solidarity Movement and following political thaw has allowed it).

Moscow, on the other hand, was dictating its anti-Chinese course to all Soviet Block countries, Poland included.

The Solidarity Movement of 1980-81 did not change too much in bilateral Polish – Chinese relations either, as the leaders of Solidarity were deeply involved in the constantly volatile domestic situation and internationally their involvement was limited. Thus, their obvious and visible anti-Soviet stance had no chance to disseminate or expand onto Chinese affairs.¹¹ Meanwhile the authorities in Warsaw also had no time for anything else and strictly followed Soviet disposals in the international arena, including those concerning China.

All these factors combined led to a kind of ‘dormancy’ of the small Polish Sinological world, in which there was no real interest in China or Chinese affairs, not to mention any exchange programs.¹² Both countries were once again, like before 1950, a world apart. A proper observation was made by one of the Polish ‘old China hands’, A. Łobacz: ‘Because of the Cultural Revolution there was a gap in the interest and research on China not only in Poland’.¹³ It was true all around the world, but especially in the Soviet Block states.

However, this era of inaction of the budding Polish Sinology was at the same time a very significant one: no one that was really knowledgeable wanted to be a part of the ideological schism and tug-of-war. Almost no one from the small group of China scholars was ready to condemn China openly, even though Maoism was never deeply rooted in any social strata of Polish society (with the exception of a few students then who were devoted to Maoist China in a Chñ Guevara leftist guerrilla fashion, but still should not be compared with the movement on French universities at the same time). To condemn China would mean to follow Soviet Russia, to follow Maoist China would mean to go into the extreme. Neither choice was tempting, and therefore this resulted in the dormancy noted above.

3.4. Same bed, different dreams (1982-1989)

Surprisingly, a chance to change the mood and especially the content of bilateral Polish-Chinese relations came in the early 1980s when the Solidarity movement

¹¹ According to K. Gawlikowski, after the martial law of December 1981 a political refugee then in Italy and close to the cradle of Solidarity movement bureau abroad in Brussels, there was an initiative by Chinese authorities to have a contact with Solidarity abroad. This initiative unfortunately was not taken seriously by the Polish side. K. Gawlikowski, “ChRL a ruch “Solidarności”.... (PRC and the Solidarity Movement...), *Polska-Chiny*...., 305,306.

¹² The first two students of the Sinology Faculty at the University of Warsaw went to China in 1979 as the first since the 1966 group of just two people within the framework agreement of the Faculty with...the Polish Foreign Ministry. For a few years some students of the Faculty went to the Polish Embassy in Beijing formally for half-a-year or academic-year-long internships, in fact – to study Chinese, and to learn about China.

¹³ Interviewed by M. Jacoby.

was crushed – at least temporarily. It was the time when Deng Xiaoping was initiating his ‘four cardinal principles’ policy, a result of the earlier crush of the Xidan Democracy Wall¹⁴ and imprisonment of its hero, Wei Jingsheng demanding a fifth modernization – democratization. (Wei, 1998, 199-212) Autocratic rulers, general Wojciech Jaruzelski and Deng Xiaoping, the latter personally afraid of trade unions and any Solidarity style upheaval (*luan*), found themselves in the proverbial same bed. However, their dreams or political agendas were not entirely the same. Poland, still honestly following Moscow’s course, was not initiating any Four Modernizations program.

The real speeding-up and a kind of change of tide started in bilateral Polish-Chinese relations only with the ‘Gorbachev phenomenon’, when both countries were finally engaged in reform programs. Since the mid-1980’s official relations have been constantly improving in both the political and economic sense. What is more, in September 1986 general W. Jaruzelski went to China,¹⁵ constituting the first visit on the highest level since the 1950’s (Michaił Gorbachev went to China almost three years after him, in May 1989, when students were demanding ‘more democracy’ on Tiananmen Square).¹⁶

After Jaruzelski’s visit, high-level exchange was re-established.¹⁷ It was a process helpful to the renovation of other exchange programs that had been frozen or abrogated for almost two decades. The bilateral Agreement Between the Government of the People’s Republic of Poland (PRP) and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Cultural and Scientific Exchange, signed in Beijing on 30 September 1986 during general W. Jaruzelski’s visit, was especially significant. (Jacoby, 2009, 340) Finally, the exchange was resumed, even if in the

¹⁴ The best, classic study of this unprecedented movement of 1978-79, demanding a move from totalitarian tyranny to a system more humane, was written by then First Secretary in the British Embassy in Beijing and eye-witness Roger Garside, *Coming Alive. China After Mao*, MacGraw Hill, New York 1981.

¹⁵ Official translator from Polish side was one of the graduates of Chinese universities then Chancellor of the Embassy (and later Ambassador), K. Burski. See: *Zhongguo he Boland jianjiao 60 zhounian/60.rocznica nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Chinami a Polską* (A special album prepared by Department of Europe – Waijiaobu Ouzhou Si of Chinese Foreign Ministry), Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, Beijing 2009, 51.

¹⁶ The best Polish and the most comprehensive (874 pages!) study on China-Russia relations of Communist era, Gorbachev era included: Tadeusz Dmochowski, *Radziecko-chińskie stosunki po śmierci Mao Zedonga* (Soviet-Chinese Relations after Death of Mao Zedong), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2009.

¹⁷ During many visits in both directions including the Prime Minister, ministers or parliamentarians „old China hands” from the 1950s emerged again – as translators or experts. Z. Gyraczyk, then Deputy Chief of Mission in Beijing, replaced K. Burski as official government translator, while Jerzy Sie-Grabowski, a long-time lecturer of Chinese at the Sinology Faculty at University of Warsaw, played the same role for economic delegations (in late 1980’s he was even constantly placed in Beijing).

late 1980s it was not as fruitful as one could expect.¹⁸

Growing interest allowed the establishment of some Chinese centres outside of Warsaw as well. The first to be mentioned is another Sinology faculty established in the late 1980's in Poznań. From the very beginning it had a different character than – the already renown – Sinology Faculty at Warsaw University. The former, until today, actually, has had the structure and face more of a vocational school (in the positive sense), focusing on teaching Chinese language,¹⁹ philology and the topic of ethnic minorities, while the latter still remains an ‘ivory-tower’ of classical Chinese (world, language and grammar), not even trying to touch contemporary issues.²⁰ In 1987 a Faculty of Japanese and Chinese studies was also established at the oldest Polish university – the Jagiellonian in Cracow. It initially specialized mostly in Japanese studies (until 2004 its first director was a well-known translator of Japanese literature, professor Mikołaj Melanowicz), and only recently made some points in Sinological studies, mainly in literature (professor Lidia Kasarełło). However, its new director, a professor of linguistics and translator from Japanese, Romuald Huszcza, who replaced Melanowicz, is also rather Japan-oriented.

What is characteristic of all the new Sinology Faculties is that they firstly dealt with literature, culture, language and linguistics. The history, economy and sociology of modern-day and especially contemporary China were almost not mentioned. This was because China - the PRC - always had been a ‘politically suspicious’ country, first with her Maoist-led ideology, and second as a different kind of reformer of socialism. Only when M. Gorbachev came to power in the USSR a visible growth of public interest on China could be noticed – but not in the institutional framework of Sinological circles. Until the end of real socialism, modern China, and especially the PRC, was on the outskirts of interest in Sinology Faculties in Poland.

¹⁸ Also in academic terms, when contemporary China was almost not covered, with the exception of J. Rowiński in Polish Institute of International Affairs. Among the most fruitful attempts to describe China of of this time are two books of former Beijing correspondent of Polish Press Agency. Ludwik Mysak, *Sześć lat w Chinach* (Six Years in China), Iskry, Warsaw 1988 and his *Chiński proces stulecia* (The Chinese Trial of the Century) on Gang of Four Trial, *Książka i Wiedza*, Warsaw 1990.

¹⁹ It brought some good results, as among its graduates are – already prominent – personalities, as Paweł Milewski (born in 1975), since 2013 Polish Ambassador to Australia, (earlier Chancellor at Polish Embassy in Beijing, and translator of younger generation for official Polish delegations) or Maciej Gaca, currently a Cultural Chancellor at Polish Embassy in Beijing (earlier specializing in Naxi language at the University).

²⁰ Only recently, under the leadership of Faculty by Małgorzata Religa, one can observe some positive change in this respect.

3.5. Children of the Tiananmen (1989-2008)

However, all the new expectations of the late 1980's were much higher than reality could provide. The reason for why it did not go well once again was mainly 'embedded' on the Polish side, focused then on domestic issues. In the early autumn of 1988 the Solidarity Movement (not Trade Union anymore) was not only back on the political stage, but soon became an official partner of the communist authorities. First it came to the Round Table Talks which ended in - partly-free - elections of 4 June 1989. As a result, on 12 September 1989 Poland - as the first country of the (former) Soviet Block - had its first non-communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The tortuous and painful, especially when it came to the economy, path of post-communist transformation was then initiated.²¹

As is widely known, the Chinese choice was different: instead of a dialogue, martial law was declared on the demonstrating students and later the octogenarian eight Elder Statesmen, Deng Xiaoping included, made a tough decision to crush the largest pro-democracy demonstrations in the history of the PRC.²² The bloodshed took place on the night of 3-4 June, just a few hours prior to Polish elections, when communist power was politically condemned and undermined by the public. By this mere coincidence, Poland, as the only post-communist country, had a strong, emotional approach to the Tiananmen bloodshed,²³ which was a real obstacle in the process of renewing relations. The era of weeping for 'the children of Tiananmen'²⁴ has come to the banks of the Vistula river as well.

This was a decisive and fateful moment for Polish-Chinese relations for the next two decades. A kind of fault-line in bilateral relations had appeared, a touchstone leading each partner into a different direction was established. The Polish choice was democratic, the Chinese authoritarian and undemocratic; Poland joined the Western institutional framework, China (especially under the leadership of Zhu Rongji) entered the era of globalization and global capitalist economy under the flagship of the opening-up policy (*gaige kaifang*), while carefully negating any pro-Western solutions suggested by the Washington Consensus' economic (and ideological) program.

²¹ One of the best Polish studies of the first chapter of this process: Tadeusz Kowalik, www.polskatransformacja.l (www.polishstransformation.pl), MUZA S.A., Warsaw 2009.

²² Crucial documentation: The Tiananmen Papers. The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People - In Their Own Words, Zhang Liang (ed.), Public Affairs, New York 2001. On the crucial, fateful decision to clear the Square on pp.355-362. Polish Perspective: B. Gyralczyk (an eyewitness to the events), *Pekińska Wiosna 1989. Narodziny ruchu demokratycznego w Chinach (Beijing Spring 1989. The Birth of Democratic Movement in China)*, Familia, Warsaw 1999.

²³ The very first, highly emotional and quick report was written by the famous journalist and globetrotter Wojciech Giełżyński, *Mord na Placu Tianamen (Slaughter on Tiananmen Square)*, Wojciech Pogonowski Ed., Warsaw 1990.

²⁴ A term from *Beijing Coma* by Ma Jian. Polish version of this novel of 2008 is available since 2010.

Especially the Polish approach to China, a position of a newcomer to the ‘democratic world’, was strongly motivated ideologically. The formally bilateral relations between Warsaw and Beijing became fruitful again, especially when the post-communist camp came back to power in Poland in mid-1993 (mostly due to the economic turmoil of the first stage of the transformation process). The President of this camp, Aleksander Kwaśniewski (1995-2005), went on an official visit to the PRC in November 1997, while Poland welcomed President Hu Jintao in June 2004.

However, even then the official line was not followed by public opinion and especially the mainstream media (TV and radio channels, major newspapers) constantly maintained that China continued to be a communist autocracy that did not observe human and minority (Tibet!) rights, in business and trade is not honest, and sells fake products of mainly bad quality. After 1989 Polish authorities and political and media elites were constantly waiting for a democratic breakthrough in China, however, in vain.

Polish Sinology at that time had some difficult choices to make. Especially those from the 1950’s cradle, who had for so long been involved in diplomatic activities or careers. Marcin Jacoby was right when he noted: ‘None of the eminent Polish scholars chose the role of a <defender> of the PRC’s policies after 1989....Most decided to speak cautiously yet critically of China’. (Jacoby, 2011) Of course, former diplomats, with their careers not yet finished or crowned were even more cautious, in both words and deeds – both Z. Gyralczyk and K. Burski were to become Polish ambassadors to China in the 1990s, i.e. during its democratic era. J. Rowiński also returned from his previous expert position to the diplomatic world, to become the DCM in Beijing in the 1990’s.

A change took place only after the collapse of communism. One can note several initiatives, when the focus was – at last! – China of today and not ancient China anymore. Finally there were no political obstacles to study modern China, even though the Tiananmen Affair was a strong mental and ideological barrier. Some initiatives of former exile K. Gawlikowski are of special value in this respect. In the late 1990’s he created a strong Asia and Pacific Research Centre within the Institute of Political Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences.²⁵

²⁵ Out of many publications under its guidance one has to mention at least three collective volumes of special value: *Chiny. Przemiany państwa i społeczeństwa w okresie reform 1978-2000* (China. Country and Social Change in the Ear of Reform...), Karin Tomala (ed.), Warsaw 2001; its volume II, K. Tomal and K. Gawlikowski (eds), Warsaw 2002. Recently: *Chiny w XXI wieku. Perspektywy rozwoju* (China in XXI Century. The Development Perspectives), W. Dziak, K. Gawlikowski and M Ławacz (eds), Warsaw 2012. Individual effort: B. Gyralczyk, *Chiński Feniks. Paradoxy wschodzącego mocarstwa* (Chinese Phoenix. Paradoxes of Emerging Power), Wydawnictwo Sprawy Polityczne, Warsaw 2010, *Przebudzenie smoka. Powrót Chin na scenę globalną* (A Dragon Awakening. Return of China to the Global Scene), Rambler, Warsaw 2012.

Almost simultaneously he created also the Centre for East Asia Civilization at the private University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw,²⁶ and finally in 1998 he initiated the publishing of the 'Azja Pacyfik' yearbook,²⁷ the first and for a long time the only academic publication focusing on contemporary East and South East Asia, especially China (recently the University of Gdańsk has been trying to follow suit in this respect, but as for now the achievements are incomparable).

Almost simultaneously with Gawlikowski's great efforts another centre of contemporary Asian studies was created at Jagiellonian University in Cracow, where, a new Faculty of East Asia and the Middle East was created (its long-time director Adam Jelonek is currently the Polish Ambassador to Malaysia),²⁸ separately from the Japanese and Chinese Studies Faculties. Recently, another Centre for East Asia, specializing in contemporary, principally economic issues, was created at the University of Gdańsk (Ewa Oziewicz, Marcei Burdelski, Director – Kamil Zajdler). At last one can study contemporary China, something that was impossible during the Communist Era. Noteworthy is also another centre of East Asian studies at the University of Lodz (Małgorzata Pietrasiak, Dominik Mierzejewski, among others).

In the early 1990's, immediately after the change of the political system, a new window of opportunity in Chinese studies was opened, one that, due to political reasons, was completely closed before: Taiwan as a partner. The official line of the new, democratic Polish governments was to propagate the 'democratic system' on Taiwan. The Polish President (1990-1995) and famous Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa was tempted to go to the island, but for geostrategic reasons could only do so as a private person, which he did several times during the Chun Shui-bian Presidency in Taiwan.

This warm political climate allowed for trade and economic relations with the island to be expanded, as well as giving a chance for another route of Chinese studies. According to data provided by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Poland, official student and scholar exchange was initiated in the early 1990's and has been growing ever since, to 51 people at the end of 2005 and 128 at the

²⁶ Its great scholarly achievement is the volume *Wielkie przemiany w Chinach. Pryba bilansu reform Deng Xiaopinga (Great Change in China. Balancing Deng Xiaoping's Reforms)*, K. Gawlikowski and M. Ławacz (eds), Warsaw 2012.

²⁷ Almost all its content, with the exception of the last two issues, are available on: www.azja-pacyfik.pl

²⁸ At least one Sinologist of a younger generation after a longer stay in China from this faculty should be mentioned here – Łukasz Gacek. He published two volumes: *L. Gacek, Chińskie elity polityczne w XX wieku (Chines political elites in XX Century)*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Cracow 2009; *Bezpieczeństwo energetyczne Chin (Energy Security of China)*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Cracow 2012.

end of 2012.²⁹

The scientific exchange agreement signed between Poland and the PRC during the visit of President Hu Jintao in Poland on 8 June 2004 stipulated openly – for the first time – that mutual, intergovernmental annual exchange of all kind (students, PhD students, scholars, lecturers or interns) should be composed of 35 people – in both directions (in 1987 the number was raised to 40, as the agreements were signed for only two or three years).³⁰ However, it is almost impossible to assess how many Polish students have gone to study in China recently, as a great wave of exchange is taking place outside the official framework, with private schools and institutions playing a special, positive role in this respect. According to one study, only in 2006 already as many as 386 Polish students went to China. (Pawlowski, 2009)

3.6. “Strategic Partnership” (2011 - ?)

Finally, in the end of 2011, another high-level official visit of the Polish President to China was organized, the first one since the previous visit of A. Kwaśniewski. During this stay of President Bronisław Komorowski, mainly in response to Chinese intent, a special Strategic Cooperation Agreement was signed. Trying to make it more real and less on paper the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the first person in this position since the change of the system in Poland, visited Warsaw. In April 2012 he proposed several bilateral, mainly economic projects, to be paid for with Chinese money and with the help of Chinese sources. (Gyralczyk, 2012) However, the Polish response to those new initiatives has so far been rather moderate and reserved. There is still no pro-Chinese lobby of any kind in Poland (the only politician with a bigger interest in the Middle Kingdom has so far been the former deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Polish People’s Party, Waldemar Pawlak).

All new initiatives notwithstanding, two phenomena that originate from the past are still strongly visible in official behaviour in Poland: (1) Polish elites are prejudiced towards China, keeping their distance from Chinese initiatives, and (2) China is still treated as a developing, Third World country on the other side of the world, rather than as a potential global power.

The rapidly growing Chinese role on the international arena, especially after the global crisis of 2008, has finally brought China into the Polish public discourse as well. But even now it is limited and not so important in the political

²⁹ The Author is grateful to Mr. Yen-shin Chu from Taipei Office in Warsaw for providing this data.

³⁰ Marceł Burdelski, 60 lat stosunków Polski z ChRL – rys historyczny (60 Years of Polish Relations with the PRC A Historical Sketch), in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków* (China in Polish Eyes), Editors, Gdańsk 2010, 145. This is a special anniversary volume on the occasion of establishment of diplomatic relations produced by the University of Gdańsk.

or media mainstream. To some extent it is still an era of (political) constraints. However, simultaneously, one can also note some creativity while dealing with China, probably the first of its kind, since during the communist era it was by definition not possible, and after the democratic change it was limited, due to both countries' different strategic choices. Only now, in the first years of the second decade of the 21st century a real, growing interest in China can be observed in Poland, especially in the economic sphere, including publications. Fortunately, there are also more and more impressive results in other fields, which will be presented in detail in the next chapter of this study.

4. Sinology as Destiny

Encounters with China can take many different forms. Some people choose China as a narrow, academic specialization, some others choose the Middle Kingdom as a way of life, remaining devoted to it for a lifetime. If it is not rejected at an early stage, something that happens quite frequently, China can be a serious choice in any individual's life. Of course, in the case of countries so distant in all respects (language, culture, civilization, etc.) as Poland and China, when there are no ethnic or local similarities, the individual choice must be either rather strategic or a long-term one. Let us study some Polish cases.

4.1. Sinology in the narrow sense

This choice means nothing but taking up oriental and Sinological studies, followed by an academic or expert career.

4.1.1 Sinology as an academic career

The first Sinology Faculty was, as mentioned above, created prior to World War II, in 1933, at Warsaw University. Its reestablishment after the war, and especially the political and diplomatic incentive after the proclamation of the PRC, has given the chance to promote Sinology as an academic career. Some of those who went to China in the 1950's (and early 1960's) chose this opportunity, like M. Künstler, R. Sławiński, T. Żbikowski, becoming later 'the golden names' of Polish Sinology.³¹

³¹ M. Künstler was a long-time director of the faculty, and at the same time a prolific translator (mainly from French and English), a prolific writer of academic or – more frequently – popular works, spreading knowledge of China. T. Żbikowski was a translator of, among others, *Xi You Ji* (Journey to the West), part I, *Czytelnik* Warsaw 1976, part II, *Czytelnik*, Warsaw 1982. Specializing in modern Chinese history R. Sławiński has finalized, as for now, his career by two volumes: *Historia Chin i Tajwanu* (History of China and Taiwan), Wydawnictwo Naukowe ASKON, Warsaw 2002 and *The Modern History of China* (both in Polish and English version).

In this era of political alliance, the first institutionalized academic exchanges and growing public interest also led to the publishing of two masterpieces of Polish Sinology, written by its most important representatives: Witold Jabłoński (the first director of the faculty, until his premature death in Beijing in July 1957), Janusz Chmielewski (a long-time second director of the faculty), Aleksy Dębnicki and Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (most of them educated in France). The first of them was ‘*Antologia literatury chińskiej*’ (Anthology of Chinese Literature), from ancient times to Mao, published in 1956, and the second (by the same authors, with the exception of A. Dębnicki) the Polish version of Zhuang Zi’s Classic, published in 1953 and entitled ‘*Prawdziwa księga południowego kwiatu*’. Both volumes were, quite rightly, obligatory texts for many generations of young Polish Sinologists in spe.

For a long time the Sinology faculty of the University of Warsaw was the only possibility when it came to choosing Sinology as an academic career. The next faculty at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow was not established until 1987. A year later the same happened at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. Finally, in 2011, another faculty was created – at the Catholic University in Lublin (director: R. Sławiński, previously, for a long time, in Warsaw, later in Cracow). Thus, the opportunities to choose this way of life are slowly, but constantly growing.

It is too early to say yet what kind of academic impact the creation of Confucius Institutes will have. Until now all four of them in Poland (Cracow, Poznań, Opole and Wrocław) have been created as affiliated with Polish academic institutions or universities. The two most active, those in Opole and Cracow, have chosen a slightly different approach. Opole specializes in language and business courses, while Cracow produces also scientific volumes of some merit.³² It is too early to judge what can really be expected from these symbiotic actions of both sides. However, it is worth observing.

4.1.2 China watchers

During the communist era some people in Poland, due to political circumstances not too many, have chosen China as constant observers. The most prolific and visible case is that of J. Rowiński (from the fourth group sent to the PRC in 1954), who immediately after his return to Poland in 1960 joined, like many others, the Polish Foreign Ministry, and soon after went to China again (he left Beijing in December 1968).³³ After his return he joined the Polish Institute of International Affairs and – mainly under the nickname of A. Halimarski – was a

³² One of the most important: *Confucian Tradition. Towards the New Century*, Adam W. Jelonek and Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow 2008.

³³ As interviewed by M. Jacoby.

constant commentator on Chinese affairs, also in the media, including the then most influential official weekly, 'Polityka'.

Of course, in communist times there was no other choice but to be an observer close to the official line. Only later, after the Solidarity movement's spring of 1980-81, when Poland experienced – large and impressive – underground political and publishing activity (*samizdat*), supported by the always strong and important Polish political community abroad, some new options were opened. One of them, the most important intellectual force of Polish émigré intellectual life, Jerzy Giedroyc's Paris-based monthly 'Kultura' was used by K. Gawlikowski to publish some studies on contemporary China. As a person living abroad after the imposition of martial law, he initiated, less frequently, to publish as well political commentaries of all sorts.

The democratic change of 1989 changed every aspect of life. Finally, there was a chance to become a real, independent commentator. However, China was not in the mainstream of interest, for two major reasons: (1) Poland 'went to the West' and wanted to be anchored in the Western institutional framework (NATO, the EU, OCED, Council of Europe, etc.), strongly neglecting the so-called Third World, and (2) The aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre (as described above).

In the Polish mainstream media the image of China remained unchanged until another fault-line of global affairs, i.e. the economic crisis of 2008. Then, however, the new generation had come to the fore in respect to China studies. Most of its representatives are also Chinese- (or Taiwanese-) educated, once again with a deep, personal knowledge of the subject. Thus one can observe some completely new, previously unknown initiatives. In 2009 Radosław Pyffel inaugurated a private think tank, called The Study Centre of Poland, more and more visible in the Polish media.³⁴ Another initiative by a circle of former Polish students in China came to life in early 2012. It is now located both in Mainland China and in Poland (its driving forces are: Wojciech Jakybiec, now in Beijing, Konrad Godlewski in Shanghai, D. Mierzejewski in Łydz³⁵). They created another interesting website: "Na temat Chin" (On China).³⁶ For the first time ever we have some real commentaries on contemporary China given by knowledgeable people, with a big Sinological background, sometimes directly from China. This is a completely new value in Polish public discourse.

³⁴ www.azja-pacyfik.pl, accessed on 5 Januray 2014.

³⁵ He recently published an important volume on foreign policy of PRC: D. Mierzejewski, *Między pragmatyką a konfucjańska moralnością. Dezideologizacja retooryki chińskiej polityki zagranicznej w okresie reform* (Between Pragmatism and Confucian Morality. Removal of Ideology in Chinese Foreign Policy in the Reform Era), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łydzkiego, Łydz 2013.

³⁶ www.natematchin.pl Accessed on 5 January 2014.

4.2 Sinology as a way of life

In the broader sense, Sinology can be chosen as a way of life by certain individuals. In this respect one can use the knowledge of the Chinese language as a tool in his or her further career, whether it be bureaucracy, business or even, in unique cases, a political option.

4.2.1. Bureaucratic/Diplomatic career

In the communist era almost all graduates of Chinese universities, with their deep knowledge of the country were either tempted to choose central bureaucracy or to become career diplomats. The exceptions were those few who studied art in China (Stanisław Tworzydło) or stayed in academics, choosing another way of life. The graduates of the Sinology faculty at Warsaw University, the only one during almost all of the history of the PPR (1944-89), had no such language skills, therefore their choice for this way of life was much more limited. Still, one can name a few exceptions, e.g. Jerzy Bayer, recently Polish Ambassador to Thailand and Burma/Myanmar or Stanisław Leśniewski, who for a long time worked in Polish economic diplomacy, also as a translator.

The situation changed almost completely after the change of the system, when the number of graduates knowing China (or Taiwan) from their own experience after having studied there started constantly growing. This time diplomacy or state administration were not the only options, these people rather chose direct involvement in economic life.

4.2.2. Sinology as a business opportunity

This choice was completely excluded during the communist era. As a real choice it has emerged only recently, especially after 2008, when it was already obvious that China was also a great business opportunity.

Poland after Tiananmen did not allow the visa regime for the citizens of the PRC to be liberalized (as Hungary did), thus the Chinese only recently started to come to offer their business skills, and still in limited numbers (the Chinese community in Poland is some three thousand people only, while in Hungary, a country three times smaller, it is at least ten times larger, i.e. over 30 thousand individuals of Chinese origin). The option to work in Chinese companies in Poland was also non-existent, but has changed recently, after President Komorowski's visit and the implementation of the 'strategic partnership' plan, after which two Chinese banks came to Poland and many Chinese companies started to invest.³⁷

Much earlier many Polish individuals –but not institutions!— saw China as perhaps not an Eldorado, but as a real business opportunity. The principal

³⁷ The first attempt, by a company named COVEC, to build a small part of highway between Warsaw and Łódź showed completely different business mentalities and led to a bitter retreat.

role among them was, naturally, played by graduates of Chinese colleges and universities. The number of those young businessmen who did not necessarily study only Chinese language or linguistics is constantly growing. Among them is K. Godlewski, who has exchanged a career in journalism in Poland for a stay in Shanghai, Łukasz Sarek (his wife, Katarzyna, a PhD student at the Sinology faculty of the University of Warsaw) is emerging as one of the important columnist dealing with Chinese affairs, publishing mainly on the website ‘Kultura Liberalna’ (Liberal Culture)³⁸ or W. Jakybiec.

We must mention a spectacular and ongoing initiative on Polish, not Chinese territory. Adam Marszałek, who has a large private publishing house in the town of Toruń, probably the largest scientific publisher apart from the official Polish Scientific Publisher (PWN), with support of the Chinese Embassy in Warsaw, has in recent years signed many agreements with Chinese publishing houses, providing many books and publications directly from the Chinese market. Unfortunately, practically all of the publications, of different merit in both the original and final versions,³⁹ are translated from English and not directly from Chinese. Still, this is the first time since the early 1960’s that a Polish audience has had access to more or less renown Chinese authors.⁴⁰

4.2.3. Sinology as a political choice?

A world apart from each other, both in the geographic and political (or ideological) sense, Poland cannot offer any “Chinese solution” for a political career. Only in the early 1950’s, during the only alignment chapter in our bilateral history, official friendship with China was supported from above. This situation has not happened again since, even now, during the era of constant growth of Mainland China’s role on the global scene

Poland has no pro-Chinese political lobby of any kind – in any political party or option, the post-communist Social Democratic Party (SLD) included. Everyone recognizes that in the atmosphere of recent decades, after Tiananmen, a real friendship with China is not a political solution, also in terms of political gains. What we have instead are verbal declarations of ‘friendship’ and many official delegations, always ready to visit this ‘exotic’ country, something that has been described as ‘sight-seeing diplomacy’. (Gyralczyk, 2012) The only Polish high-level politician interested in Chinese processes and affairs is – already mentioned

³⁸ www.kulturaliberalna.pl

³⁹ See details on the website: <http://www.marszalek.com.pl/> This is a matter worthy of an independent study.

⁴⁰ Adam Marszałek Publishing House is focused mainly on scientific books, mainly in humanities (economy, sociology, etc.), only partly dealing with literature. However, Chinese literature, including Nobel Prize Winner Mo Yan, is recently quite well represented and visible on the Polish market – from many other publishers. This is another issue worthy of a special case study.

– W. Pawlak, recently of lesser political significance. In political terms, China is not an opportunity in Poland, though it is slowly becoming an option for a fruitful career in the economic and business sense.

5. Sinology – Individual Choices

Here the dividing line between the communist and the democratic era is the sharpest. The realities of the two political systems were so different that individual choices made during these two periods are also incomparable.

5.1. Prior to 1989 – the communist Era

5.1.1 The China-born generation

It is little known to the outside world that since the 19th century a Polish community had existed in China. According to meticulous study by Marian Kałuski, a Polish journalist in Australia, this Polish community in the North-East (Dongbei) town of Harbin was created as a result of the involvement of Polish engineers and workers in the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway. Some of them had decided not to come back to their native land, which – due to its partition – was then to a large extent a part of the Russian Empire, and to settle in China. At its peak moment in 1903 there were some 7 thousand of them. Some two thousand Poles remained in Harbin (plus there were 500-600 Poles in Tianjin and Shanghai then) when Poland returned to the maps as an independent state after World War I. A major evacuation of this community was arranged in July 1949, and later partially until 1958. This was not known to the public, as the process contradicted the officially proclaimed ‘friendship’ in bilateral relations. The final blow to this community came with the Cultural Revolution, after which only a single Pole, Edward Stokalski, stayed there – as a kind of monument – since 1971. Unfortunately, and symbolically, as a 95-years old person he left Harbin for Poland in December 1993 and passed away soon after. Thus ended the only Polish Community chapter in Chinese history. (Kałuski, 2001, 31, 68)

One person from this ‘Harbin community’, Edward Kajdański, who graduated in 1951 from the Harbin’s Institute of Technology and left the town next year, later became a Polish diplomat in the economic sphere, and after his retirement from service became a prolific writer on Polish-Chinese affairs, including his important study of the first Polish Sinologist, a Jesuit clergymen Michał Boym (1612?-1659).⁴¹ He also left some interesting memoirs from the life of the Polish

⁴¹ Boym is known in some circles as the Polish Marco Polo. He left many important studies, especially on Chinese medicine and geography. E. Kajdański, Michał Boym. *Ambassador Państwa Środka (M. Boym the Ambassador of the Middle Kingdom)*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1999 (a revised and enlarged edition of the earlier one).

colony in Harbin.⁴²

The unique experience and curriculum vitae of E. Kajdański cannot be compared to anyone else's. The only other well-known case, important from the perspective of Polish Sinology, is that of Jerzy Sie-Grabowski, from a mixed marriage and also Harbin born, who was a long-time lecturer of Chinese at the Sinology Faculty of the University of Warsaw. In the 1960's he translated a lot of Chinese literature (especially in the monthly 'Chiny', mentioned earlier), while later, especially in the 1970's and 80's, became a translator of official Polish delegations and during official bilateral talks, mainly in the economic sphere.

As for now there is no other candidate to follow this course, i.e. to be born in China and come to Poland. Probably we need to wait for another generation at least to find any follower of this kind.

5.1.2 In-comers

This option can be observed in many other countries, but in Poland of the communist era it was almost completely unique: to come to a communist country from the West. The only case, important for Polish Sinology, is the one of Witold Rodziński, the son of the world-famous Polish musician and conductor, Artur Rodziński. A graduate of Columbia University in New York, in the late 1940's he first joined the UN service, and later Polish diplomacy. He was the Polish ambassador to London and later at an early stage of the Cultural Revolution (1966-69) served in the PRC. In 1974 he published the monumental *History of China*,⁴³ an achievement yet unmatched (the volumes by R. Sławiński, mentioned earlier, are of smaller size). Later, as a constant commuter between the East and West, he also published an English version of his *History*⁴⁴ (he passed away in Poland in December 1997).

Another 'in-comer' of a different sort, a Chinese who settled in Poland, is the first wife of R. Sławiński – Irena Sławińska/Hu Peifeng, who became a relatively well-known journalist in the communist epoch. She also was an important translator of literature, and published a popular volume entitled 'Things Chinese' in 2004.⁴⁵ Another case is that of German Sinologist, professor Karin Tomala, who came to Poland from the former German Democratic Republic in the 1970's

⁴² *Polska-Chiny...*, 197-236; *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, 73-103. Recently E. Kajdański finalised his efforts to describe Harbin Polish Community in large volume of his memoirs: E. Kajdański, *Wspomnienia z mojej Atlantydy* (Memoirs from My Atlantide), Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2013.

⁴³ Witold Rodziński, *Historia Chin* (History of China), Ossolineum, Wrocław 1974.

⁴⁴ W. Rodziński, *Walled Kingdom. The History of China from Antiquity to the Present*, Free Press, New York 1984.

⁴⁵ Irena Sławińska/Hu Pei-fang, *Chińszczyzna* (Things Chinese), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2004.

when she married to one of the most renowned Polish experts on German issues, professor Mieczysław Tomala.

The democratic era is still too young to allow us to form judgments about anyone from its perspective. Of course, W. Rodziński's choice cannot be repeated by anyone, for obvious reasons. As for now, we do not see anyone from China (or any other country) ready to build his or her career in Poland and already emerging on the Polish scene. However, the unique case of – relatively young, in his early 30's – Nicolas Levi, of French origin, who lives in Poland and has started to emerge as a leading expert on North Korea seems to confirm, that this option is open.

5.1.3 Refugees and Commuters

Amongst those more than 40 young people sent to China prior to 1956, with some additions in the following decade, there was a surprisingly small percent of those who left Poland after studying in China. The only case of a political asylum seeker is Renñ Goldman, who left Poland for Canada after 1956 and became a professor of Chinese Studies at the University of British Columbia in Ottawa and a scholar specializing in Maoist studies.⁴⁶

The unique choice of one Polish youngster of Jewish origin, among so many, seems to confirm an observation made by professor J. Rowiński: 'My views were leftist and I thought that big things were going on in China'⁴⁷ Rowiński seemed not to be isolated in his convictions then and after, as there was no real political dissident in the group during the communist era, maybe with the exception of M. K̄nstler, anti-ideological and anti-political by definition (and personal choice). K. Gawlikowski left Poland after the martial law for more than a decade, but when he returned to his homeland, his arguments and views were constantly flavoured with pro-PRC views. Probably not everyone in Poland will share his view that: 'Today, China does not represent a strange, exotic country with a mysterious and different system of writing anymore, but an important political and economic partner of Europe'.⁴⁸ Taking into consideration the level of knowledge of China in the Polish public discourse those words, unfortunately, still sound like wishful thinking and not an expression of hard facts or reality.

Now, in the democratic era any dramatic political choice is unnecessary. What can be observed more frequently, but it is still too early to make any final judgement, is a possibility to travel more easily between the two countries, societies and civilizations, as we can already observe in this time of globalization. In the previous, communist chapter, this choice was either dramatic – to seek

⁴⁶ His profile: <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Rene-Goldman/298080145> Accessed 2 October 2013.

⁴⁷ In interview with M. Jacoby.

⁴⁸ In interview with M. Jacoby.

asylum – or coincidental, like among those who were sent to China between 1950-66. For instance Jadwiga Jankowska (the first group) when in China married one of the most important Chinese scholars in Hungary, Barna Tólas – and went to Budapest. Stanisław Kuczera (the third group) went to the USSR where he became a renowned China scholar.⁴⁹ While Barbara Szelewa, a graduate of Sinology at the Warsaw faculty, went – for many years – to Bulgaria, also after getting married, then due to personal reasons. But all the others stayed in Poland.

Another interesting case of a commuter is that of professor Zbigniew Słupski, a renowned translator of ancient Chinese literature, who was educated in Prague in former Czechoslovakia, stayed there for a longer time, and finally established himself in the Sinology Faculty of Warsaw University. However, he is also treated as ‘our own’ by Czech Sinology.⁵⁰

5.2. After 1989 – the Democratic Era

5.2.1 Taiwan as a Choice

Only after the Communist system collapsed has Taiwan become a real counterproposal for both experienced and novice scholars of Sinology in Poland. Among those who studied in the PRC before the Cultural Revolution only R. Sławiński has openly chosen this option, keeping his distance from the PRC and publishing more and more on Taiwan-related issues.⁵¹

Among the younger generation of Polish Sinologists Bogdan Zemanek from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow seems to follow this course. He has already published several important scholarly studies concerning a wide range of Taiwanese issues (nationalism, Taiwan’s image, legal status, etc.)⁵² and is emerging as a leading ‘authority on all things Taiwanese’ in Poland. There are many signs that tell us he will not be the last one in this respect, but once again – it is still too early to judge.

⁴⁹ On his role see the occasional volume on his 85th birthday, *Sinologi mira k jubileju Stanisława Kuczery (Sinologists of the world on Stanisław Kuczera’s birthday)*, Institute Wostkowiedenia RAN, Moscow 2013. Especially important is interview with Kuczera made by younger Russian Sinologist S.W. Dimitrew, 17-74.

⁵⁰ His profile: http://www.sinologia.uw.edu.pl/pods/436_zbigniew-slupski-ph-d-professor Accessed on 5 January 2014.

⁵¹ For instance his translation from Chinese of *Taiwan Mijian xinyang - Tradycyjne wierzenia ludowe Tajwanu* by Juan Ch’ang-rue, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2007 and his *Historia Tajwanu (History of Taiwan)*, Elipsa, Warsaw 2001.

⁵² His profile: <http://www.orient.uj.edu.pl/instytut/pracownicy/zemanek-bogdan>. Accessed 2 October 2013. See his: B. Zemanek, *Tajwańska tożsamość narodowa w publicystyce politycznej (Taiwanese National Identity in Political Journalism)*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Cracow 2009.

5.2.2 China Bound. The New Generation – PRC or Taiwan educated

The democratic era has brought about a new generation of Polish Sinologists, China- (or Taiwan-) educated. They went to China, usually by their own choice, and were not sent ‘at random’, or by political affiliations or convictions, like their predecessors. Their number, political difficulties (see: Children of Tiananmen) notwithstanding, is already much larger than of those sent to China in the previous era. This is a group that is much more differentiated, one that has more choices and opportunities, with respect to both where and what to study.

A preliminary assessment of their achievements until now shows the tremendous potential of this group. Apart from those who have chosen business or diplomatic careers, some stayed in the world of academia and research. Here, two great achievements, one individual and one collective, are to be especially highlighted. Individually, M. Jacoby, a graduate of the Taiwanese tertiary education system, has produced a new Polish translation of the classic Zhuang Zi, completely different from the aforementioned ‘classic’ from the 1950’s.⁵³ Unfortunately, the author is dividing his time between the Sinology Faculty at the University of Warsaw and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, a Polish counterpart of the Confucius, Goethe or Cervantes Institutes. Thus, he is also involved in the direct management of cultural affairs (exhibitions, visits, etc.) and a prominent part of cultural life, and not only involved in deep research. However, there is potential there, as has already been shown.

One collective achievement, in all respect a pioneering work in Poland, is worth to be mentioned. It is a volume entitled ‘To Understand the Chinese. Cultural Codes of Chinese Communities’.⁵⁴ With the exception of the senior, J. Rowiński, it was prepared by the young generation of scholars, all educated in China or Taiwan, which is a situation completely new on the Polish scene and editorial market.

Another example of this new, unprecedented situation is the volume ‘Ancient Chinese Wisdom in Sentences’ edited by a person based in Taiwan, Piotr Plebaniak (2010). This is an effort to introduce to a wider Polish audience, in a very, very attractive editorial form, the rich world of Chinese proverbs and traditional saying known as *chengyu*.

⁵³ Jacoby’s translation is more ‘scholarly’, his predecessors were more ‘artistic’. Zhuangzi. Nanhua zhenjing – Zhuangzi. Prawdziwa księga południowego kwiatu, translated by. M. Jacoby, Iskry, Warsaw 2009.

⁵⁴ Zrozumieć Chińczyków. Kulturowe kody społeczności chińskich (To Understand the Chinese. Cultural Codes of Chinese Communities), Ewa Zajdel (ed), Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, Warsaw 2011. The authors include: K. Sarek, Jyżef Pawłowski (currently in the Polish Embassy in Beijing) from the same Faculty, as well as two people based in Taiwan, Leszek Niewdana and Zbigniew Wesołowski. J. Pawłowski recently published an important volume Przeszołość w ideologii Komunistycznej Partii Chin (The Past in Communist Party of China’s ideology), Warsaw 2013.

6. Conclusions

In relations with China, democratic Poland, as emerged from the Cold War world order, is a country unique in the post-communist world. By mere coincidence, one date, that of 4 June 1989, and completely different strategic choices at that moment, political relations, due mainly to reasons on the Polish side, were for almost two decades neglected, once almost frozen, but never normal.

Only the 2008 deep crisis on global markets and the rapid change of the Chinese role and image worldwide has brought about a change in Poland as well, especially in the recent two or three years, after the declaration that a ‘strategic relationship’ between the two countries was established. However, it is still more of a declaration than a reality overflowing with content. The image of the PRC in Poland, deeply distorted in the 1989-2008 period, is not normal yet. Even if China is starting to be seen as a big economic power, it is still presented in the Polish domestic scene as a state highly un-transparent and difficult to predict. It is still treated as a distant, exotic country that is difficult to comprehend.

The change of the political system had a tremendous effect on the small world of Polish Sinology as well. Due to the fact that almost no one from this circle was an open Solidarity supporter, all diplomats dealing with China survived the transition to democracy, and some of them reached the pinnacle of their careers, on ambassadorial level, only now, in democratic Poland. Of course, there was no obstacle to study China in the academic sense either. Geographical distance, accompanied by ideological and mental barriers after Tiananmen were the real obstacles in encountering contemporary China. This situation has partially changed after 2008, when the role of the PRC as a global power has become visible everywhere. Since then the climate for contacts with China has changed to some extent, also in Poland, as was confirmed by the ‘strategic cooperation’ agreement of December 2011 (what will be its final result is another story).

In the last decade, not earlier, Polish Sinology, understood in academic terms, finally diversified. It no longer consists of two strongly separated worlds, one of diplomats and state bureaucrats dealing directly with China on the one side, and one of academic Sinologists keeping their distance from PRC realities on the other. The change can be summarized in the following way:

- Those who go to China are no longer politically selected or sent by coincidence like in the 1950’s and early 1960’s. Now the people are choosing China as a study subject on their own, which is a very positive tendency;
- New Centres to study contemporary China were created (Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk, Łódź). However, the study of China is not institutionalized, there is no official think tank dealing with it, and it is a story of individual efforts mostly;

- New initiatives of creating think tanks, blogs, websites are blooming, mostly as different private initiatives, while any coordinated support from above (from the central authorities) is visibly lacking, especially for academic studies of contemporary China (the Sinology Faculties at some Universities are dealing mainly with language, linguistics, culture or literature);
- The number of publications on China is quickly growing, both in translations of important Western scholars, as well as the results of the effort of the growing number of Polish Sinologists, among them those of the younger generation, many of whom are China- (or Taiwan-) educated;
- New windows of opportunity' have appeared after 1990 and have been fruitfully exploited in the scientific (and exchange) sense, i.e. to study in Taiwan or go to China to study individually, without any official support.

The great effort of the constantly growing number of Polish Sinologist notwithstanding, the image of China in Poland was brutalized, biased and ideologically manipulated, particularly due to the completely different strategic and political choices of the two countries on 4 June 1989 for so long, that any 'return to normal' will probably take some time, especially now that both countries are not political allies anymore (like they were for a short – and only – time in the 1950's).

Sinologists seem to act to the contrary of this official line, while their political choices are of a different nature, usually that one of involvement and not negation. Thus, one can rather expect some positive results from the studies of China in Poland from the growing number of individual efforts, rather than coordinated cooperation on the highest level, where political will and intent is not necessarily compatible.

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