

# Development of Croatian China-Related Research

## Introduction

Thirty years ago, academic and scholarly circles in the transitional Croatia were only marginally interested in China. It was the time when the global supply chains started shifting to the East, while this newly-independent country was embarking in – geographically and politically speaking – the opposite direction, i.e. returning to Europe. By the mid-1990s, the first local trading ‘pioneers’ began to follow the already beaten global paths in trade with China. About the same time, the first generation of the Chinese diaspora started settling down in the main urban areas, mostly Zagreb, Split and Rijeka. This interaction remained largely a peripheral trend in a Western-looking country, limiting itself to cheap and accessible ‘Made in China’ products and newly opened affordable Chinese restaurants; these were the most tangible outcomes of cooperation with China. Beyond the Chinese New Year celebrations, the popularization of Chinese traditional martial arts that conspicuously arrived in Eastern Europe from the West, and – maybe – Traditional Chinese medicine treatments, which were still hardly distinguishable in the unregulated market of alternative medicine, not many other cultural products, brands and services could pass mercantilist-oriented interaction with China.

When China initiated a set of “outward-reaching” strategies in the first decade of 2000, Croatia was caught wrong-footed, fully in pursuit of the Euro-Atlantic integration process which dominated over many cultural and academic aspects of life. Therefore, during the ‘primetime’ of the European China-bound cooperation initiatives (2002-2008), i.e. in the period of a sudden surge of interest in understanding the cooperation and investment opportunities with China, in learning Chinese economic models, business culture and language, Croatia lagged several years behind.

With the institutionalization of Chinese foreign political initiatives and the advent of Belt and Road, 16+1 Cooperation mechanism between China and Central Eastern Europe, the interest for the Orient emerged again, and was timidly followed by a more active academic and cultural cooperation. Several bilateral agreements in education and cultural exchanges were signed, creating oppor-

tunities for a new generation of adventure-seeking students. Moreover, at the University of Zagreb the Free Study of Sinology was launched in 2004 and the Confucius Institute opened in 2012, witnessing several years of surge in the enrollment rate.<sup>1</sup> It may have been expected that Asian Studies scholars, including the aspiring ones, would take advantage of this attention; what happened instead was an institutional drag in (an already long overdue) establishment of Sinology and China Studies. This can only be explained by a combination of: bureaucratic inertia, deeply ingrained orientalist perception of the socialist-era-related knowledge, and emerging neo-liberal view on creating hybrid and regional (geographic area-related) academic disciplines. Additional aggravating and mostly consequential factors were a lack of academically trained professionals able to carry out academic and institutional build up, as well as tight roped (political) factionalism within academic institutions, not much in favor of granting positions and sharing scarce financial sources with the newcomers, in the otherwise quite rigorous and informal vetting practices behind the process of academic promotions.

Meanwhile, one-time-off lectures on various issues of the modern development of China or courses on Chinese economy, history and politics integrated into curricula on some ‘global’ perspective, served as an alternative source of China-related knowledge occasionally offered at the Faculties of Social Sciences, Political Sciences or Economy. Some privately owned schools started to design various crash courses on ‘doing business with China’ which included topics on politics, modern history, and diplomacy packaged into semester-long curricula. There was also a steady increase in Chinese language courses, so that by 2019 – through the work of Confucius Institute – they were offered as a non-credit course in every major Croatian university. It was certain, however, that the pending establishment of Croatian Sinology, defined within traditional or classic academic boundaries, was ill-adapted to follow the market-oriented approaches. Just like other area studies in general, it became a target of an increasingly salient utilitarian rhetoric that split ‘applicable’, ‘useful’, ‘relevant’ knowledge on contemporary China from

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<sup>1</sup> The study of Sinology as a non-degree or “free” study was a program offered at the Department of Indology and Far Eastern Studies (renamed recently as the Department of Asian Studies) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. After some initial institutional and political conundrums, the study of Sinology was finally set up in 2004 through the support of professors from the Department of Asian Studies (formerly Department of Indology and Far Eastern Studies), a mother institution of Croatian Oriental Studies. It was a three-year non-degree program offered to students from the 5<sup>th</sup> semester onward. In the first 20 years, it offered language training courses (Modern Standard Mandarin) taught by teachers provided by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban). It also offered professional academic subjects, such as: Chinese Philosophy, Chinese Literature, Chinese History, Classical Chinese Philosophy that were taught either by one or two ‘in-house’ professors or by visiting professors from the University of Ljubljana. In the academic year 2024/25 this program became a degree-carrying undergraduate and graduate program. For further information, see: Buljan 2023.

‘scholastic’, ‘historical’ (and even ‘obsolete’) knowledge through which a ‘classic’ Sinology as an established academic discipline had increasingly been perceived.

Without much of institutional gravitas to begin with, the program of the newly formed Croatian Sinology is taught by only a few professors and professional enthusiasts from different walks of life. Thus, Croatian Sinology is currently faced with the challenge of maintaining academic integrity while trying to stay relevant by keeping track on ever expanding China-related knowledge. It is, in a way, forced to go through a daunting task of institutionalization during the process of commodification of academic knowledge and knowledge transfer.

Therefore, our understanding of Croatian Sinology departs not from some anchoring academic institution licensed to appropriate and disseminate China-related knowledge, but rather from a loosely defined network or community of professional Sinologists, experts and enthusiasts on China who contributed to the development of China-related knowledge and research in Croatia. Likewise, China-related research (CRR) and China-related knowledge (CRK) as the main object of study of this network is purposefully chosen as the topic of this paper to avoid, on the one hand, scholastic limitations that might arise from the institutionalization of Sinology as a discipline with a pre-defined canonical research focus (language, history, culture, literature, philosophy, art, science, music and cinema – exactly in this order).<sup>2</sup> On the other, it also wants to avoid entrapments of popularized, digested and distorted knowledge on contemporary China that usually comes as part and parcel of – broadly defined – China Studies.

CRR or CRK (hereinafter used interchangeably) therefore not only avoids dividing or juxtaposing Sinology and China Studies (as circumscribed in the argument: i.e. what used to be established as Sinology is now being sold as China Studies), but reflects this dynamic between institutionalization and marketization of academic knowledge about China.<sup>3</sup> Only within such framework may we begin

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, legal placement of Sinology as an academic discipline within the field of philology: Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, *Pravilnik o znanstvenim i interdisciplinarnim područjima, poljima i granama te umjetničkom području, poljima i granama*, in: Narodne novine 3/2024 [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2024\\_01\\_3\\_69.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2024_01_3_69.html) (21 May 2024)

<sup>3</sup> There are no clear and strict academic definitions delineating the field of Sinology from China/Chinese Studies. Besides different scholarly traditions (primarily American, European, Chinese and Japanese), where each has a different understanding of the correlation (or subordination) between the two fields, there are several other subfields developed within these traditions (Pekinology, for example), together with some concurrent ones, that are either hard to subsume under any field (kangaku), or are disputed between different scholarly traditions (Tibetology, Mongology). However, as an operative definition based on general convention and naming practices rather than some established academic consensus, Sinology tends to be defined as an academic discipline that focuses on the study of the Chinese civilization that includes language, history, culture, literature, philosophy, art, music, cinema, and science, but is primarily regarded from the historical perspective as “equivalent to philology concerning the Chinese classics and other literature written in Chinese language” (Honey 2001: XI). China Studies, on the other hand, are usually contextualized as a subfield

sketching the history of the Croatian CRR, the main topic of this paper. Because without institutional memory which Sinology brings into play, it would be hard to claim Croatian ownership in cases with disputed or unclaimed CRR heritage; however, without a ‘populist’ trait within China Studies there would not be much history to talk about in the first place.

## Overview and periodization of Croatian CRR

What follows is a brief (and perhaps subjective) overview of the development of the (written) history of Croatian CRR, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the current moment. In order to locate CRR within the scope of academic research, we first need to point out its predominantly trans-disciplinary and sub-disciplinary nature. This is not surprising considering the belated institutionalization of Croatian Sinology and limited avenues of interaction Croatian academic and scholarly circles have had with the Chinese world. Therefore, during nearly a hundred years of Croatian CRR, we can trace the impact of medical to political sciences, as well as other different disciplines, in formulating the main narratives on CRR.

Along with the ‘populist’ extension of the China Studies, we can also find CRR suspect of carrying a certain political or economic agenda, obvious cultural or ideological bias, methodologically unsophisticated style or outright political pamphleteering. These are all growing pains that CRR was passing through in the pre-institutionalization phase, and which can still be found as nurturing a certain distorted image of China. Nevertheless, both the narratives formed around established disciplines, as well as agendas peddled through some quasi-journalistic discourses, are constitutive for understanding the history of CRR.

Major changes in the CRR’s narrative and agenda indicate not only the development of the dominant topical foci (from general overviews on the Chinese way of life to specialized perspectives on particular issues of the Chinese modernization process), and narrative forms through which the knowledge was transferred

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of area studies or directly subsumed under East Asian Studies with research focused on (contemporary) China and grounded in social sciences and humanities. Departing from historicist rather than any normative perspective in delineating academic boundaries between the two research fields, this paper regards the philological research focus on Chinese classics as constitutive for Sinology, while it views the focus on social sciences and more contemporary knowledge as pertaining to China Studies. Throughout the development of Sinology and China Studies, their research focus and methodologies have generally tended to converge and complement each other, notwithstanding their mutually critical perspectives that in extreme cases describe each other as prone to distortions and simplifications in pursuing useful and contemporary knowledge (see, for example: Liu, Qing 2020: 129–155), or as having a “discipline fetish” (Schwartz 1964: 537-538) and producing scholastic and antiquated knowledge. For further discussion on understanding of China Studies and Sinology, see: Zurndorfer 1999: 4-33. For American Sinology: Shambaugh 2024: 314–331; Chinese “Sinology” (*Hanxue* or *Guoxue*) see: Zurndorfer 1999.

(from first-hand travelogues to scholarly articles). They also trace a different level of inter-disciplinary compartmentalization of CRR and the entrenched representations through which knowledge about China has been channeled in the past 100 years. Additionally, the trans-nationality of Croatian CRR should also be acknowledged to a certain extent, as Croatian Sinologists and related scholarly communities had close, organic and highly interconnected relations with their peers from scholarly communities in neighboring countries for most of the CRR development period.

Having in focus changes in narrative and agenda, as well as the development of topical foci and compartmentalization of CRR, we can discern five periods which overlap with general historical periodization, i.e. pre-WWI period, the interwar period, the Cold War period, post-1991, and, conditionally, a new period starting in approximately the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### “Pre-History” of Croatian CRR

The earliest, pre-WWI period is the most challenging to define, as the existence of Croatian CRR, as defined above, might be contested in some or all of the categories. This usually means that there are either no written records in Croatian, or that a topic may be only fragmentarily related to China, or that it dwells in some metahistorical narratives – in other words, knowledge or scientific research itself sometimes should be taken in very broad terms. Finally, its contribution to the Croatian academic community, as it is understood today, cannot be clearly established. Yet, it is a long period with some significant but ambiguous authors, where it is especially tempting to go as far back as to take Marco Polo’s travelogue *Il Milione* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the starting point of Croatian CRR. In the following passages, we will briefly show how CRR narratives regarding certain historical persons evolved over the years.

Even though today even the briefest among Sino-Croatian bilateral relations overviews starts with the contributions of Marco Polo, a Venetian with possible Dalmatian origins, it is also highly certain that his links to Croatian cultural heritage are rather vague.<sup>4</sup> In 1271 Polo started his 3-year long journey to China

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<sup>4</sup> As a result, there has been a lively and continuous discussion about Marco Polo’s origins and identity. His family origin surviving documents on his place of birth, as well as the authorship and linguistic identity of *Il Milione* have been subjects of meticulous hermeneutical research of “Marcopolists”. Although there are no reliable sources to claim that Polo was born in Korčula or Dalmatia, there are significant sources (e.g. *Chronicon Iustiniani*, 1358, *Chronica veneta historiae* 1446, *Le vite dei dogi* 1522, Document MS 12475 from The British Library, et al. (this list of documents is here by courtesy of the anonymous reviewer of this text)) linking the origin of his family with Dalmatia, likely the Šibenik area. For details on Polo’s origins and related research, see: Puljiz-Šostik 2015: 4-16. Also, for tentative consensus regarding his ‘Italo-Croato-French-Asian’ identity among Marcopolists, see: *ibid.* 16.

from Venice through Syria, Armenia and Central Asia. After arriving in Yuan China, he spent 17 years serving under Kublai Khan. Polo's return to Europe coincided with the war between Venice and Genoa (1294–1299) during which he was captured, allegedly after the battle of Korčula. In the Genoese prison, Polo recounted his stories from China to his prison mate and writer Rustichello, who wrote down and published them in French as *Descriptions of the World or Travels of Marco Polo* (better known under the later title *Il Milione*). Descriptions of Polo's travels laid the foundation for the early modern European representations of China and the Orient; the great popularity of his book inspired numerous European adventurers, explorers and sailors to follow in his footsteps in both the geographical and narrative sense.

The earliest attempts to reclaim Polo's Croatian heritage probably started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the first romanticized accounts on his affection for his native Korčulan, and possibly local (non-Italian) blood relations started to appear; they can, however, hardly be corroborated with any surviving evidence. It might be argued that probing into Polo's belonging and national legacy in subsequent periods coincided with the persistent domination of national-romantic canon in historical conceptualizations of the 'autochthonous' cultural transfer in pre-modern Croatia, rendering the question of his national heritage as important as the legacy of his work in general (see, for example: *Danica horvatska, slavonska i dalmatinska* 1846(7-2): 24, also in: Puljiz-Šostik 2015: 9). Moreover, given a certain inferiority complex that the Croatian intellectual elites have been known to display vis-à-vis European identity from time to time, the compartmentalization of Marco Polo's legacy within the framework of the Croatian national historiography may also exemplify a certain subjectivational practice in occidentalizing self-identity by leaning on 'more European', transcontinental and post-imperial cultural traditions, in this case, Italian.<sup>5</sup>

In the post-accession Croatia (2013–), the afterlife of his national legacy is to be found in the increasing familiarization with his cultural impact in modern China. As a result, and following the marketization trends in academic knowledge, his legacy has been re-branded within the globalized vision of China and its intercivilizational exchanges, while his 'Croatianess' is designed to represent Croatia primarily as a cultural-tourist destination. In this way, Marco Polo as a 'mythological patriarch' of Croatian CRR transcends the narrowness of national historical narratives while remaining an important link in the current Sino-Croatian interactions.

Less disputed is the heritage of Ivan Ureman, a prominent Croatian Jesuit, missionary, mathematician, and proto-geographer who followed in the footsteps of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), and spent four years in Portuguese Macau learning Chinese and preparing for missionary work before arriving in the mainland China in 1620. Although he was praised for his crucial role in the transfer of mathematical knowledge from the European to the Chinese tradition (Borić 2021: 499–512; Peng

Yuchao: forthcoming), his contribution in the opposite direction (and thus his possible contribution to CRR) regrettably never even started because he fell ill and died in Nanchang during his first year in China.

Besides a trading adventurer and a Jesuit missionary, Croatian ‘prehistorical’ CRR can trace the third typical Western figure who came in contact with ‘feudal’ China, this time as an imperial emissary. Due to complex transnational and imperial history of Southeastern Europe in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the historical figures at the forefront of the South-Eastern imperial projects and policies provide great insight into the problems of representation, identity and colonial discourse of imperial nations. One such example is Sava Lukić Vladislavić-Raguzinski (1669–1738), “Illyrian count”, “father of the Russian diplomacy”, “intercultural mediator par excellence” (Calic 2019: 146), originally a Serb from eastern Herzegovina who was raised and educated in Dubrovnik.

Having pursued higher education in France and Spain, he arrived in Tsarskoye Selo, Russian Imperial family residence, where he entered the service of Peter the Great. While in service, he participated in several expeditions to Qing China and famously brokered the Treaty of Kyakhta (1727) which provided a stable framework for relations between Imperial Russia and Qing China that lasted until the series of “unequal treaties” in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Academic interest in his life and work has long focused on his role in proto-Westphalian intercultural relations (the West – Ottoman Orient – Imperial Russia – China), interreligious relations (Russian concordat with the Roman Curia), and his international relations in general, sometimes growing into myth-bordering fascination with his ‘James Bond style’ biography. Currently making a slow comeback within the Russian academic circles, his contributions to the Russian diplomacy were deemed indispensable, particularly in the opening up of the north route of Tea Road and the consolidation of the Russian pre-colonial Eastern policy.<sup>6</sup>

Given the heterogeneity of Vladislavić-Raguzinski’s historical impact, research on him in works written by Croatian and Serbian authors has mostly concentrated on the birthplace’ of his cosmopolitanism (namely, his education in Dubrovnik) on the one hand, or contributions to cultural and political nation-building efforts (Serb-Orthodox identity) on the other. His Chinese excursions were rather episodically derived from secondary sources.<sup>7</sup> However, his diplomatic

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<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of our paper to introduce, let alone list the fairly abundant literature on Marco Polo’s life and work. For a recent significant Croatian CRR contribution, see: Puljiz-Šostik 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See: Andjelković, Nataša. *Srbija, istorija: Sava Vladislavić Raguzinski*, BBC, Jan 11, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-59775344> (May 25, 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Within such nation-centric research framework, two distinctive and possibly opposing historiographic paradigms and cultural-political discourses on the representation of his life and work might soon come to the fore, especially if global academy rediscovers his work on China. As a Ragusan Serb, he also might fall victim to ludicrous and mutually provincializing disputes over Dubrovnik’s Baroque-era

and trade contacts with China, proselytizing Orthodoxy in Beijing and the Far East presage the redefinitions of his inter-cultural legacy and position him, somewhat idiosyncratically, beyond national, ethnocentric or local-centric historiographic paradigms.

Franjo Luka Jelačić (1720–1776) followed a somewhat similar path as the one taken by Vladislavić-Raguzinski a couple of decades earlier, however with a more scientific bent. Under the auspices of the Viennese Jesuits, Jelačić headed to St. Petersburg where he passed the exam to become an assistant doctor. Between 1744 and 1764, as a full-practice doctor, he participated in three Russian caravan expeditions to China by the orders of the St. Petersburg Academy, bringing the root of the medicinal plant ginseng to Russia along with some early Jesuit texts in French and Portuguese on medicinal properties (Dugački 2001: 48). After successful expeditions to China, he completed his service in St. Petersburg's main military hospital. Largely critically unexplored his work marks the end of the *ante statum nascendi* period of Croatian CRR and indicates a certain convergence, although lagged, with the main European tendencies in positivist appropriations of China-specific knowledge.

## The Stage of Innocence

The first academic program that considered China-related research as an independent study area was probably Classic Sinology, a sub-discipline dominated by philological approach which under the 19<sup>th</sup> century positivist zeal tried to systematize Chinese literary legacy and provide concurrent, translatable hierarchization of Chinese classics. In the subsequent stage, through the interplay of European colonialism and the romantic turn in social sciences, scholastic focus on 'legitimate' academic topics slowly diverted into the study of *Volkskunde* or Chinese traditional literature and customs. In this turn, secular scholars replaced the 'commentarial tradition' of Jesuit scholars, and became the main figures in conveying the archeology of Sinosophia (Traditional Chinese knowledge).<sup>8</sup> China-

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literary heritage that has been ongoing between Croatian and Serbian intellectual elites (Matica hrvatska 2023; Negrišorac 2020: 121-140). Be that as it may, it is certain that his ethno-religious origin and upbringing in one of the main cultural *entrepôts* of the Mediterranean world have helped to build his multicultural identity which served him well in contacts between Catholic Italy, Orthodox Russia and Muslim Ottoman Empire.

<sup>8</sup> Scholarly tradition of Jesuits residing in China and focusing on written classical Chinese and "critical annotated translations" (Zundorfer 1999: 14) of Chinese classics preordained the philological focus of Classic Sinology. Romantic reaction tried to get rid of this "philological hairsplitting" (ibid. 15) by promoting ethnographic and more comparative methodologies, while also to a certain extent sidelining the importance of Jesuit scholarship for conveying CR knowledge over the course of several centuries. For rediscovered Jesuit contribution to CRR, see: Honey 2001; Mungello 1989.



related knowledge within such a new scope was perceived as largely untouched, containing a vast geographical diversity and unbounded historical depth waiting to be acquired. As much as the European colonial powers in the Late Qing period advanced towards inland China in pursuit of what was believed to be an inexhaustible source of economic profit, Occidental appropriation of the Chinese *sui generis* knowledge went parallel to it, also in quite a magnanimous manner. Traditional (Chinese) knowledge within this research paradigm had barely started developing any social science methodologies. It was therefore regarded largely as holistic and ahistorical, catching under its umbrella everything from medicine to paintings, not differentiating between the historical contexts of the Late-Han local chronicles and the Neo-Confucian texts.

As a matter of fact, Croatian CRR did not catch this train, but it caught a glimpse of two trends that stemmed from the *fin-de-siècle* Sinosophia and continued well after WWI. The first one was the popularization of China-bound travelogues. Capturing the enchanting exoticism of China, these travel-writers formed the first cross-class and cross-national popular representations of the Far East. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traveling to China became more accessible, no longer reserved only for seamen, colonial officials, missionaries and soldiers. Besides travelogues, writing diaries, media reports, minutes and notes on Chinese culture and customs became a highly popular pastime activity of a Westerner in China. These popular and sometimes commercial representations were usually furnished with stereotypical images and dream-like exoticism that made the country attractive to a Western reader. Also worth noting are surprising (cultural) exchanges and the introduction of a relativistic perspective to these ‘innocent’ cross-cultural encounters (Ewertowski 2017: 2–8).

Hrvoje Grgurić's firsthand and inland encounters with post-WWI China, published in 1931 as *Na Dalekom Istoku. Uspomene našeg dobrovoljca iz Sibirije, Mandžurije, Mongolije i Kine (In the Far East. Memories of our volunteer from Siberia, Manchuria, Mongolia and China, Zagreb, 1931)*, open some novel categories of Oriental representations of China.<sup>9</sup> Enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian

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<sup>9</sup> In travel literature, “an arrival scene” often takes on special significance for the characterization of relations and categories of Oriental representations (Pratt 1986: 31–32). By this time, a traveler usually discovered China by ship or by train, as the time-consuming caravans had already gone out of fashion. In the first case, when a traveler arrived in China by ship, typically on some Hong Kong-ese, Cantonese or Shanghainese dock, s/he experienced an overwhelming attack of China on his/her senses that will linger during the entire travel-writing experience. Strong smells and a colorful view of the harbor docks, along with the bustle of commercial spirit and entrepreneurial vigor of an incalculable multitude of people as far as the eye can see, leave the main impression. On the other hand, inland China, when reached by caravans, was opening to the curious gaze much more gradually, via the centuries-long and uninterrupted Silk Road from Persia through the Fergana Valley and the deserts of southern Xinjiang, to the first border fortifications of the Chinese Empire. “If China seen from a ship is a wide panoramic shot with many elusive details that play with the attention of traveler, with the light step of a camel it is revealed as a distant, barely maintained focus encircled with desert mirage

army in 1914 and sent to the Galician front, his war journey to remote places resembled the path of a multitude of those forced to serve in the war between two decadent and foreign imperial powers that would soon be wiped out from the international scene. However, in 1917, a year after he was captured, Grgurić joined the Russian Army, where the turmoil of the Russian Civil War catapulted him to *Dalniy Vostok* (Far East). In 1918, as an artillery officer in the army of Ataman G. M. Semyonov, he served in Harbin and Chita, then later he engaged in trade and traveled through Siberia, China and Mongolia. For some time, he was a counter-intelligence officer in Vladivostok, from where he returned to Chita in 1921 and was employed as a clerk at the Ministry of Economy of the Far Eastern Republic (Hameršak 2000: 25–40). Arrested twice, then expelled, in 1925 he returned to the Kingdom of SHS via China.

Grgurić did not venture into China on private matters, but served under the Russian military command, which might be a trait that imprinted China in his work as just one among many *terrae inanis et vacuae* (such as Siberia, Manchuria, Mongolia...) between Europe and the Russian version of the Far East utopia. However, unlike the original matrix of the ‘Western Wilderness’ in the American Western genre, the Chinese space is quickly to be revealed as abundant and fascinating, but also as possessing quite estranging cultural traits. It can be said, continuing the parallel with the similar world-building vision of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan pilgrims on the American soil, that *Dalniy Vostok* was Grgurić’s newfound colony, a place which (albeit in a geographically inverted fashion) conceptually offered a refuge from the decadent West and the incomprehensible East. The political context of Grgurić’s biography indicates a certain Krležian post-WWI *zeitgeist* of a disillusioned officer in search of a new country and ideology, fragments of his writings revealing China as a sort of cultural *tabula rasa* awaiting a civilizing mission or providing a space for a new wave of ideological Puritans escaping sinful Europe. This tendency can be confirmed in his later memoirs *Kroz tamnice i crvenu maglu. Doživljaji u zemlji nove ideologije* (*Through Dungeons and Red Fog. Experiences in the Land of New Ideology*, Zagreb, 1932), and *Što sam vidio. Utisci iz današnje Njemačke*. (*What I Saw. Impressions from Contemporary Germany*, Zagreb, 1934), where political commentary dominates over unbiased reporting, or in the novel

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that slightly enhances the mysticism of contact with the first traces of this civilization of the East” (Bakota, Ivica. *Dunhuang- ishodište Puta svile i vrata drevne Kine*, CRI, Sep. 9, 2023, <https://croatian.cri.cn/2023/09/30/ARTIrFPM6R8vkSYbW2Q7Q7rr230930.shtml>, May 20, 2024). Along with this distinction, we may establish two different ‘places’ of China as coherent objects of knowledge ready to be subjugated by European imperial language: one, the deceitful but infantile (maritime) China, and the other, the admirable but impregnable (inland) China. These two discourse-geographies, formulated through different categories of representation (and – with a dose of oversimplification – different means of transportation) will continue to exist as distinctive traits within travel literature on China.

*Istok ne prašta* (*The East Does Not Forgive*, Zagreb, 1935) where a more black-and-white critical perspective is espoused in order to depict a backward and traditional China. Nevertheless, although his quest for a new ideology will lead him, in his later works, to a somewhat uncritical appraisal of Hitler's reforms, which impacted his readership and marginalized his contributions to the popularization of travel literature on China, his travelogue remains the first Croatian work that conveys main trends in the European popular representations of China.

The second modernization trend evolved around scholarly circles after WWI. After the demise of the Qing Empire (1912), historians began to treat China through the 'decline' narratives.<sup>10</sup> In a strange turn of events, it also nurtured a narrative of 'the century of humiliation' which started to take shape around WWI and erupted after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The May Fourth Movement (1919) tried to profoundly reconsider and halt this 'doomscrolling' tide among the last remnants of Chinese *literati* and the Western-education-infused Chinese (overseas) students. In its long post-WWI aftermath, marked by political chaos and warlordism, several currents of thought came on stage, among them communist, general anti-traditionalist, nationalist, etc., all essentially defined according to their understanding of the westernization/ modernization divide. One current followed the "deorientalization" path, i.e. it tried to establish the Chinese nation tailored according to European nation-states, and the Chinese relationship to the world in opposition to the traditional concepts. The nationalist or patriotic current, on the other hand, primarily sought modernization as a means to regain authentic and specific relation to the (Western) world.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, the attention to Chinese case studies, as they were called at this stage, had broadened accordingly, especially after the modernization impulse from China facilitated a surge of political studies on complex conjunction of modernization, nationalism and the "warring-roaring period" of the 1920s. Progressive optimists, at least of the American post-Wilson era kind, extended their hand to what they perceived as a growing demand for guided modernization efforts. On the other side, the new Soviet Russia started assessing, from a Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>10</sup> Prior to this, geographical conceptualizations of China as a single historical entity were accepted long before the modern period, but it was only after a stalemate and subsequent consolidation of the colonization scramble that China was 'granted' a single geo-political entity within the pre-WWI international order. This fixed its semi-colonial status into a buffer zone between concessions, colonies and interests of colonial powers. In such a way, China was conceptually Ottomanized as a 'sick man from the East'. China's parallel 'decline' thesis had its own periodization that adhered to local dynastic times.

<sup>11</sup> The overall assessment of the social and political impact of the May Fourth movement is still subject to diverse interpretations. Without getting too deep into the details of contemporary debates, we can mention that many authors may have leaned towards exaggerating its revolutionary character, while also propelling views on the exceptionality of China's modernization path and overall 'greatness' of Chinese civilization which will get a new impetus in later periods. See: Dirlik 1989, 2005: 19-53.

framework, progressive political forces in China. Both came to the conclusion that among all those Young Turks brought up with the May Fourth, nationalist Kuomintang-led movement was best suited to a mix of modernization and westernization they had to offer. After colonial officials, it was now time for foreign experts to mediate CRR.

Andrija Štampar (1888–1958) and Berislav Borčić (1891–1977) played a significant role in this modernization transfer, because both of them held leading positions among international public health experts in the 1930s China, working together towards the introduction of Western standards of public health and medicine.<sup>12</sup> Their contribution to the organization of health services in many urban and rural parts of China, the establishment of provincial, township, district institutes for the protection of public health, is today seen as the beginning of the modern Chinese public health system. Borčić arrived in China in 1930 to advise the Chinese government on the organization of public health, and stayed there, with brief interruptions, until 1938. In Nanking he founded the Central Institute of Hygiene with the School of Public Health, an institution designed after the Institute of Hygiene with the School of Public Health in Zagreb where he had previously served as director. At the invitation of Borčić, and after a successful career in modernizing public health in Croatia, Štampar also arrived in China.<sup>13</sup> From 1931 he visited China several times, traveling to main cities as well as to provincial townships. He communicated not only with many prominent scientists but, as an appointed counsellor to the Kuomintang-led Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek, he was acquainted with the top-level political view on China's developmental challenges.

Štampar's diary, later to be published as *Dnevnik s putovanja 1931–1938* (*The Travel Journal 1931-1938*, Zagreb, 2008), provides invaluable insight for understanding the health system reform in China. Also, through his encounters with fellow experts-expatriates and high-ranking officials in the Chinese government, he became cognizant of dismal conditions in China's education system, public administration, etc. (Dugac 2008: VL-LVIII). His diary does not avoid reporting the difficult social situation in provincial China. Terrible forms of human exploitation and near-slavery work conditions would later become topics of his writings; as a firm modernizer, he argued that the work on the improvement of public health is futile if the country fails to raise the standard of living. Having an ear of many members of the Chinese political elite at the time, he expressed a certain

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<sup>12</sup> At this point we may add that the Croatian-Argentinian criminologist Ivan Vučetić (1858–1925) made an impact in China. Pioneering fingerprint recognition system (dactyloscopy), Vučetić traveled to China in 1913 to help to introduce the system in China's law enforcement services. See: Hameršak 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See the biographical note on Berislav Borčić in Dugački 1989. <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/2422>, (Apr 17, 2014)

optimism in sharing his insights on economic and social conditions in China, and in eradicating immense social differences and a backward system of land ownership that enabled them. Thus, he showed a commendable interest in, and understanding of particularities of local circumstances in China, and in that respect he was a rare foreign expert with a genuine interest to influence China beyond the scope of his expertise. Nevertheless, his precepts on the development of rural China and, arguably, presumptuous tutorship in that regard (Štampar 2008: 620), have positioned him within a group of experts who showed great latitude in implementing modernization to China's particular circumstances, but also to those who firmly believed that modernization and westernization efforts were a remedy to China's ailments. Štampar's diary, therefore, displays a staunch progressivist attitude regarding the solving of Chinese social problems as well as a certain *naïveté*, shared by the elitist expert community and Chiang Kai-shek's clique alike, regarding the possibility of a swift implementation of modernizing efforts in such a vast country.

### “Red” Phase

The aftermath of WWII brought tremendous changes in CRR. Namely, for the ‘core’ Western CRR, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 meant that its research subject largely fell behind the Iron Curtain, which significantly impacted the dynamic of interaction and transfer of CRR knowledge. The American media lamentation that “the world has lost China” – after the victory of Mao Zedong's communists – would gear academic cooperation towards the so called ‘free’ Chinese world, i.e. Hong Kong, Taiwan and communities of Chinese overseas diaspora. Likewise, the academic and institutional bifurcation of CRR soon started to take shape. As Sinology gradually distanced itself from the romantic idea of emancipation, it assumed an upward cultural trajectory, and after a while became an elitist discipline almost void of contemporary knowledge. Red China Studies, on the other hand, stepped in seeking to establish applicable and useful knowledge on the political system, contemporary society, economic challenges, ideological debates, and miscellaneous go-betweens (Shambaugh, 2024: 314-330). As a matter of fact, with the formation of the Cold War bi-polar order and the advent of socialism in the Soviet-led bloc, the Red Studies became a new research approach encircling all trans-curtain geographies, from Berlin to Pyongyang. The West was primarily interested in knowledge which could provide a possible leverage in this vast region, setting up research centres and college departments where knowledge produced had an ancillary relation to the national interest. Useful information or, better, intelligence, was the most valued CRR outcome, and the (non-resident) CRR specialists and China-watchers were the main figures in its dissemination.

The development of the Red China Studies during this period was inseparable from the emergence and development of sociology (social theory) and political sciences. These more contemporary disciplines would dominate over historiographic, philological, ethnographic and other approaches that had previously guided CRR research. Another important institutional shift was the creation of area studies centres that sought to create synergies between the disciplines. China Studies underwent institutional consolidation; schools, departments and research centers primarily in the United States and other Western countries launched interdisciplinary China Studies training programs, courses and projects. Aiming at applicable knowledge, China Studies programs oriented themselves towards fulfilling contemporary Cold War needs, providing diplomats with a ‘survival kit’ – intensive training courses in local language(s), culture, society and politics.

A somewhat different evolution of CRR happened in the cis-curtain area, i.e. in the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union. By the end of WWII, and especially after 1949, China remained open to Soviet scientists and researchers. “Leaning on the one side” policy (*yi bian dao*) proclaimed by Mao Zedong – following the establishment of the People’s Republic – meant an almost exclusive transfer of modernization knowledge, skills and techniques via Soviet experts. China started rapidly adopting Soviet-style education campaigns and swiftly adapted to Marxist-Leninist historiography and social sciences. On the other end of this transfer, Soviet experts and researchers were able, as long as the political climate between two countries remained steady, to conduct surveys on China’s development. Unlike in some Western countries, clear-cut academic hierarchization of CRR did not occur here, since most of the research work in the USSR was conducted not at universities, but at specially set up research institutes. Universities were in charge of providing propaedeutic knowledge, a comprehensive, basic training on the area study, usually including historical, geographic, linguistic, social and political courses. As such, they were more preoccupied with correct ideological interpretations and official propaganda than with the applicability and usefulness of knowledge.

Croatian CRR in the post-WWII period was fully ingrained into the Yugoslav institutional disciplinary structures. At least until the Tito-Stalin split (1948), it meant following the Soviet model in the institutionalization of area studies. Of course, Yugoslav CRR at this stage was rather rudimentary; related research was mostly integrated in structures geared towards the common episteme of the ‘socialist world’ in general (national revolution as a paradigmatic historical event, focus on industrialization and other more quantitative aspects of modernization, etc.), and towards propaedeutic knowledge-building – all of these largely required Soviet crutches. This all seems to have been reflected in the books published on China, such as a Croatian translation of the Russian political report: *Kineski narod u borbi protiv reakcije* (*The Chinese People in the Fight Against the Reaction*, Zagreb, 1947), *Geografija Kine* (*Geography of China*, Zagreb, 1949) an epony-

mous geographical study on China, or *Borba Kine (China's Struggle*, Belgrade, 1949), a chrestomathy written by Voja Terić on 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese history that focused on the two main revolutions: Xinhai (1911) and People's Liberation Revolution (1949).

In the subsequent period, Croatian CRR (alongside Yugoslav CRR) was collateralized in political and ideological tensions between Beijing and Moscow, forcing it to leave the Soviet shadow in conceptualizing and acquiring CR knowledge, and eventually facilitating an advent of its own, partially CRR-inspired, post-colonial vision of area studies development. Relations between Yugoslavia and China were from 1949 impregnated with the tension that stemmed from China's newly established foreign-political hierarchy. The 1948 Tito-Stalin split occurred at a time when China was trying to secure a stable Soviet support for post-war state-building efforts. Consequently, apparent and unique similarities in evaluating the 'national episteme' within the uniform socialist-internationalist methodologies were shoved aside. (This primarily meant ignoring the similar independence and national revolutionary struggles and anti-fascist people's liberation movement of China and Yugoslavia.) Despite this, similarities between the Chinese revolutionary experience with the Yugoslav 'independent' and 'national' people's liberation struggle was 'unearthed' in *Kineska revolucija i Moskva, (Chinese Revolution and Moscow*, Belgrade, 1953) by Vladimir Teslić, or *Kina Mao Ce Tunga (Mao Zedong's China*, Sarajevo, 1956) by Đorđe Radenković, unambiguously indicating Yugoslav post-InfoBiro struggles in legitimizing its own, concurrent historical narrative vis-a-vis rigid Stalinist interpretations on conducting proletarian revolution within national circumstances.

However, the escalating tensions between Moscow and Beijing over *inter alia* intra-bloc ideological supremacy and the correct interpretation of socialist unity and solidarity, by the late 1950s would also cloud over Sino-Yugoslav relations. An anti-Yugoslav campaign launched in Chinese media in 1958, evolving over the following two years into an "attack against Yugoslavia, but targeting Soviet Union" (Sun, in Bakota 2023: 47; Stopić: 2021: 36–44, 88–94), carpet-bombed everything that Yugoslavia stood for in the international context. The traits of Yugoslav socialist system, such as social ownership of the means of production, self-managed labor relations, restoration of private ownership in agriculture and small entrepreneurship were not the only ones under attack. The Yugoslav non-aligned position in international relations, its interpretation of the active peaceful coexistence and peaceful transformation of the existing world order were all criticized as blatant ideological revisionism (see: Stopić 2018: 138–158). China openly challenged Yugoslavia for being not only an unruly, self-centered country that was painting with consumerist and capitalist color the otherwise uniform socialist bloc. Yugoslav loosely-interpreted Marxist-Leninist principles in pursuing inter-party relations and supporting people's liberation movements were, according to China, also encroaching on the Third World, i.e. on the emerging,

postcolonial world of Asian and African countries which Beijing had started to increasingly regard as within its own exclusive geo-conceptualizing purview.

In an interesting turn, the 'Yugoslav prelude' of the Sino-Soviet split (1961–1968) served as a catalyst for the consolidation of foreign policy principles that defined Yugoslav 'soft power' in the Cold War era. In 1960, in order to rebuff accusations and criticisms stemming from China, Edvard Kardelj published *Socijalizam i rat: osvrt na kinesku kritiku politike koegzistencije*, (*Socialism and War; Reflecting the Chinese critique of the Peaceful Coexistence Policy*, Belgrade, 1960). In more than a 100-pages-long manifest-styled pamphlet, he defended young Marx's substratum of the Yugoslav socialist system, assertively positioning peaceful coexistence, Yugoslav main foreign policy brand, as a viable alternative to warmongering Chinese positions. Chinese critique of Yugoslav socialism pushed for a classification of Chinese Marxism as an antithesis to Yugoslav Marxism and the most rigid form of Stalinist orthodoxy; this is visible, for example, in Predrag Vranicki's monograph on the history of Marxism: *Historija marksizma* published in Zagreb 1961. Moreover, socialist imperialism, a label Chinese leadership had previously tagged onto the Soviet intra-bloc foreign policy could, from the Yugoslav perspective, also be applied to China.<sup>14</sup> As it was argued, Sino-Soviet ideological conflict encapsulated a rather aggressive narrative that reduced ideological disagreements to the narrow conceptual constraints of geo-political domination over the international socialist movement in the emerging post-colonial Third World. Essentially, these two socialist behemoths were fighting over ideological hegemony in post-colonial Africa and Asia, but were, paradoxically, engaged in the same old colonial-style scramble for geopolitical domination over these new international subjects. In such context, Yugoslavia emerged from a fight with another flagship brand of its foreign policy, i.e. non-alignment policy.<sup>15</sup>

Following the first decolonization wave in the 1960s and the successful organization of the first NAM Conference, Yugoslavia's non-aligned policy started to receive greater attention from the academic and scholarly circles around the world. Nonetheless, considering the impact of China's critique of Yugoslavia, it would not be too far-fetched to claim direct CRR involvement its formulation. After all, the concept of peaceful coexistence was likely CRR-inspired or, at the very least, there occurred a surprising synchronicity in political debuts of *miroljubiva koegzistencija* (peaceful coexistence) and *heping gongchu* in their respective countries.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For example: Miličević, Obren (1962), *Kineska politika: pozadina kampanje protiv Jugoslavije*, (*Chinese Politics: Behind the Scenes of the Anti-Yugoslavia Campaign*, in: Miličević 1962).

<sup>15</sup> Chinese critique of Yugoslavia opened a research niche on Sino-Soviet relations, socialist imperialism and Sino-Yugoslav ideological contradictions. See, for example: Dapčević-Oreščanin 1962; Dapčević-Oreščanin 1963; Eremija 1962.

<sup>16</sup> See: Bakota et al. 2024: 34–120; Stopić 2023: 193–219.



Meanwhile, in brewing its own non-aligned “flavor” (Bracewell, 2013: 292) within the global vision of the post-colonial world, Yugoslavia also touched China as a *topos* of travel literature. Fadil Hadžić, Bosnian/ Yugoslav/ Croatian writer and journalist, in his two texts, a comedic travelogue *Budha me lijepo primio: putopis slučajnog moreplovca* (*The Buddha Received Me Well: The Travelogue of an Accidental Mariner*, Zagreb, 1955) and his later collection of travel sketches, *Put oko svijeta: putopisi* (*Travels Around The World: Travelogues*, Zagreb, 1962), attempts to discard bourgeois mystifications of China. Through engaged, socialist approach to travel writing Hadžić remaps Chinese geography within boundaries of the emerging new world that is pregnant with political struggles, not only distant exotic landscapes. The re-discovery of social and political spaces of China popularized the *xiaxiang* or “go down to the countryside” travel accounts, made accessible to more experienced and more China-savvy travelers. In this pre-Cultural Revolution period, Vladimir Baum, journalist and recipient of a Chinese scholarship, traveled to China during 1956 and 1957, and then published his travel accounts as *Pod nebom jedno je carstvo sredine*, (*Under the Heaven There is one Middle Kingdom*, Zagreb, 1959).<sup>17</sup>

By 1960s and early 1970s, Croatian CRR became more specialized, compartmentalizing within the disciplines of political sciences and international relations in order to stay current with turbulent social and political changes brought up by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). However, Croatian/ Yugoslav CRR did not excel in its new research focus of understanding internal dynamics or grasping insider perspective of Chinese political life. The main reason was that the two main professional institutions mediating political CRK at the time, Belgrade’s Institute for International Politics and Economics (Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu), and the Institute for International Labor Movement (Institut za međunarodni radnički pokret), lacked academic and professional networks with China and therefore had little first-hand knowledge. CRR’s main sources of information were telegrams from Beijing, carrying an array of information from diplomatic circles in Beijing, that were supplemented with information from diplomatic networks in other socialist and non-aligned countries. Processing opaque descriptions of Chinese political life, without falling into the trap of reductionist, theory-driven distortions or simplifications, became a challenge for researchers in close proximity to diplomatic sources. Several monographs by Dragutin Šolajić, such as *Politika Kine* (*Politics of China*, Belgrade, 1965), *Kineska kulturna revolucija* (*China’s Cultural Revolution*, Belgrade, 1966); a volume edited by Dinić and Lazić *Narodna Republika Kina: koncepcije o socijalističkom razvoju i politika u međunarodnim odnosima* (*People’s Republic of China: Con-*

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<sup>17</sup> Also, see: Marinković 1958.

*cepts on Socialist Development and International Relations Policies*, Belgrade, 1970); or Radovan Vukadinović's *Vanjska politika NR Kine (Foreign Policy of PR China)*, Zagreb, 1970), might all be cases in point.

Despite these limitations, Yugoslav political CRR developed its own niche within the academic compartmentalization of the Third, non-aligned World. Some IR groundworks, like Leo Mates's *Međunarodni odnosi socijalističke Jugoslavije (International Relations of Socialist Yugoslavia)*, Belgrade, 1976) found it necessary to include Sino-Yugoslav relations within their scope. This is also a period of more heterogeneous translations of CRK to Serbo-Croatian, including René Étiemble's popular work *Poznajemo li Kinu? (Connaissez-vous la Chine?)*, Belgrade, 1964), Edgar Snow's *Druga obala reke (The Other Side of the River)*, Belgrade, 1968) and *Crvena zvijezda nad Kinom (Red Star Over China)*, Rijeka, 1971), Roger Garaudy's *Kinesko pitanje (Le probleme Chinois)*, Belgrade, 1967), as well as some encyclopedic contributions regarding China's pre-modern history, archeology, art and literature coming from the Western (English, French and German) as well as Eastern (mostly Russian) sources. After the first translation form Italian in 1954, Polo's *Il Milione* was by 1970s republished three more times.

From about this period, we can trace a timid endeavor to (re)habilitate or legitimize Chinese philosophy within the highly hierarchized system of (Western) philosophy practiced by the Croatian academia.<sup>18</sup> During the high tide of non-aligned conceptualizations of the world area studies and particular exposure of some researchers to anti-Eurocentric and anti-universalistic thinking, there were attempts to acknowledge the academic relevancy of Chinese philosophy by granting it two entries (*Tao* and *Te*) in authoritative encyclopedic publications, such as *Filozofijski rječnik (Philosophical Dictionary)*, Zagreb, 1965; in: Filipović 1965/84/ 89) (Buljan 2023). At the time, Chinese philosophy dwelled in an epistemic 'indigenous reserve area', not much distinguished from, generically termed, philosophies of the East and only marginally appearing in courses on history of philosophy. It should not come as a surprise that dominant theories of philosophy in Croatia were under strong continental tradition and independent Marxist thinking, both of which displayed certain academic elitism *vis-à-vis* philosophical traditions of the East. As such, there was casual argument that, unlike ancient Greek philosophies, Eastern traditional philosophies never encountered *logos* or that it never became independent from *mythos* (Pajin 2013: 37–38). A challenge for scholars and researchers trying to shake up entrenched Eurocentrism within Croatian academia was to avoid segregating philosophies of the East into some subpar, alternative academic compartments, but to take the high road by rekindling debates on Western-Eastern philosophical traditions through established and referent

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<sup>18</sup> For a broader philosophical account of Chinese traditional thought, see Čedomil Veljačić's seminal work *Filozofija istočnih naroda (Philosophy of the East)*, in: Veljačić 1958)

frameworks within the continental philosophy.<sup>19</sup> In this way, unlike in some other traditions, philosophies of the East were not alienated from the Croatian academic discourse; henceforth philosophical CRK topics, albeit vaguely distinct as such, would later assume this trait in discerning more CR issues, eventually setting topical ground for the establishment of Croatian Sinology.<sup>20</sup>

The end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, followed by a short honeymoon period in Sino-Yugoslav relations, enabled an unprecedented opportunity for interactions between China and the then-Yugoslav republics. After the death of Mao and before the launch of the Reform and the Opening Up, China made a U-turn in policy towards Yugoslavia. As a result, Yugoslavia became a role model and one of the most frequently reported-on countries in the Chinese media, intensified also by Tito's visit to Beijing in 1977. Before gradually taking the course to leave the socialist bloc, China was set to learn from Yugoslavia's reform and modernization experience, and to become perhaps one of the last big powers that fully appreciated its added value in international relations. In these couple of years, Yugoslavia partially assumed a maieutic function in modeling China's international self-confidence, progress and development that would rely on open relations toward the global world. Such a particular knowledge transfer was not entirely one-directional. Benefiting from increased interactions between Belgrade and Beijing, Croatian journalists, travel-writers and students stepped in to make up for *temps perdu* and published first-hand accounts, reflections, and interviews on social and political changes in China. In this period, we can already find travelogues and memoirs discussing the great change that China was undergoing. The narrative that would remain a staple in travel literature on China in the years to come is *Kineski dnevnik (A Chinese Diary, Zagreb, 1978)* by Mitja Gorjup. It is structured around three main periods of the Chinese world, starting with the mysterious millennial history and the new opening with the People's Republic, followed by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and the great change experienced after the death of Mao. Another first-hand account on the great change can be found in Aleksandar Novačić's *Veliki zaokret (Great Turn, Zagreb, 1979)*, which foreshadowed main

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<sup>19</sup> A certain step forward was made with the establishment of the Section for Philosophies of the East at the University of Zagreb. Also, according to Pajin, one of the chief points of entry in this discussion was a reference to Karl Jaspers' *The Great Philosophers (Die Großen Philosophen, Munich, 1957)*, published in 1957 as a platform for comparative perspectives on Greek and Eastern philosophical tradition (Pajin 2013: 36). Also, a translation of Feng Youlan's *Istorija kineske filosofije (A History of Chinese Philosophy, Belgrade, 1971)* helped in contextualizing, if not exacerbating, the tension between the Western and Chinese philosophies. For Feng's positivist contribution to Chinese philosophy, his Malcom-X/sque gesture in inverting essentialism of the Western philosophy, see translation of Wu Xiaoming treatise: Buljan 2008: 988.

<sup>20</sup> Distinctive contribution in this field, also foreshadowing the equidistance of philological and philosophical approaches in Croatian philosophical CRR is present in works of Čedomil Veljačić: Veljačić 1977; Veljačić 1982; Veljačić, Kardaš 2003.

journalist narratives on China in the Opening Up period.<sup>21</sup> A central figure in popularization of contemporary CRK is Dara Janeković, a journalist and foreign correspondent who engaged in CR topics during her entire career. Her *Veliki mir...tada bi zavladao svijetom; zapisi iz Kine* (*Great Peace... Would Then Rule the World; Records from China*, Zagreb, 1979) is also a first-hand testimony and a political-psychological essay on China's contemporary history.

In more than a decade of cultural and social interactions, academic and student exchanges were both facilitated and considered an important medium for transmitting China-related knowledge. However, unlike its intra-Yugoslav neighbors Serbia and Slovenia, Croatia never followed up on a relatively thriving network of academic exchanges by institutionalizing China-related knowledge in schools and universities. Instead, it relied on an informal division of disciplines regarding Asian area studies, focusing on the development of Indology and, maybe, Turkology, while leaving Sinology and China Studies to a few educated China-enthusiasts.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the eighties, Croatian scholars began to produce more specialized CRK work. Within philosophical circles, the West-Rest debate would continue in scholarly journals, allowing more CRK-oriented articles to come to fore.<sup>23</sup> As a result, overviews on Chinese philosophy, M. Gaspari's "Kontekst i osobenosti kineske filozofije" ("Context and Specificities of Chinese Philosophy"), M. Saje's "Konfucijanizam kao ideologija tradicionalne Kine" ("Confucianism as the Ideology of Traditional China") appeared in the first issue of *Kulture Istoka* (*Cultures of the East*) in 1984 (Pajin 2013: 38–42). More specific accounts appeared in this journal as well, on Zhuangzi and *wuwei*, "Paradoksi sudbine, delanja i ne-delanja" ("Paradoxes of Destiny, Action and Inaction") by M. Gaspari, and "Delanje i ne-delanje kod Zhuang Zia" ("Zhuangzi's Action and Inaction") by R. Pušić (ibid. 42–43).

Moreover, besides essayist literature (Janeković, *Deveto nebo: putopisi i zapisi iz Kine*, (*Nineth Heaven: Travelogues and Writings from China*, Zagreb, 1987); Ostojić, *Kina: gradovi, krajevi, ljudi*, (*China: Cities, Regions, People*, Sara-

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<sup>21</sup> Based on earlier travel experiences, but published in mid-1970s, *Svakodnevna Kina* (*Everyday China*, Zagreb, 1975) by Davor Šošić makes a somewhat transitional case in travel literature on China.

<sup>22</sup> Indology-led Oriental studies in Croatia stemmed from a long tradition of the University of Zagreb, where Sanskrit has been taught since 1876 and academic links with Oriental schools and departments of Central European universities continued to be cultivated and maintained throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study of Indology at Zagreb was founded in 1959 by Radoslav Katičić, an Indologist trained at the University of Tuebingen. He laid foundations for a philologically based study which continues to be the cornerstone for development of Croatian Indology. See: Ježić 2012: 5–16; Buljan 2023; Andrijačić 2018: 349.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, polemics between Veljačić and Mikulić, in Pajin 2013: 38. Also, journals and magazines popularizing the Philosophies of the East include: *Kulture Istoka*, (with contributions from Veljačić, Merlin, Premur, Saje), themed issue of *Književna smotra* (1976) "Iz orijentalnih književnosti i predaja" from 1976 (Malić 1976) and *Most* (No. 4, 1990.)

jevo, 1984)); or specialized geographic contributions and monographs, like: Friganović, *Narodna Republika Kina (The People's Republic of China)*, Zagreb, 1978), Croatian CRR developed towards foreign-political contextualization of Chinese reformist course, especially vis-à-vis the non-alignment movement, see: Petković, *Nesvrstanost u osamdesetim godinama, (Non-Alignment in the Eighties)*, Zagreb, 1982), Petković, *Nesvrstanost i Jugoslavija na pragu XXI veka, (Non-alignment and Yugoslavia on the Threshold)*, Zagreb, 1989); critical topics of China's contemporary history, as in: Marović, *Tri izazova staljinizmu, (Three Challenges to Stalinism)*, Opatija, 1983), Butorac, *Suđenje kulturnoj revoluciji, (Cultural Revolution on Trial)*, Zagreb, 1981); and economic circumstances, see: Dragičević, *Kina: između siromaštva i industrijskog razvitka, (China: Between Poverty and Industrial Development)*, Zagreb, 1978); *Međunarodni ekonomski odnosi NR Kine, (NR China's International Relations)*, Zagreb, 1979); *Posebnosti društveno-ekonomskih gibanja u NR Kini, (Specificities of Social-Economic Movements in NR China)*, Ljubljana, 1984). In the same decade, Croatia began to translate some influential CRK works from English, French, German and Russian. Joseph Needham's, *Kineska znanost i Zapad: velika titracija (The Grand Titration: Science and Society East and West)*, Zagreb, 1984), Jean Pierre Drège and Emil Martin Bühner's, *Put svile (La route de la soie)*, Beograd, 1986) and Anthony Christie's *Kineska mitologija (Chinese Mythology)*, Opatija, 1987), to mention just a few, have helped to popularize China Studies as distinctly different from "red" topics.

## Pragmatic Turn

The period after the breakdown of European socialism, and the establishment of the independent Croatia following the dissolution of Yugoslavia was a period of a more pragmatic acquisition of CR knowledge. Echoing main shifts in the international academia, most of the socialist-era knowledge, together with Lenin's busts and other socialist paraphernalia, ended up in scrapyards, while global-integrationist, pre-communist and national identity projects became the dominant paradigm in area studies. This was also partially the case with China Studies. Notwithstanding the fact that China was a liminal case because it did not undergo any systemic changes, and the relevance of socialist-era knowledge was waning, there occurred a seeming resurgence of culturalist or nationalist research approaches underpinned by persistent *doxa* in the Western scholarly circles, which claimed that China's peaceful transition was imminent. Another, more gradual, but also dominant research paradigm was China's return to the global world. Much of the debate revolved around regional and global consequences of China's gradual assumption of a more responsible global and international role.

The liminality of CRK socialist heritage might have had some resonance in the neighboring Serbian intellectual circles, which throughout the nineties lived in

a sort of ‘petrified transition’. In Croatia, on the other hand, policies initiated soon after the country gained independence disrupted many avenues of established interactions. On the institutional level, as has been previously mentioned, Croatia was adhering to its own version of the *lingqi luzao* (“starting from scratch”, Zhao 1996: 46) doctrine, i.e. by discarding Yugoslav, communist and Oriental (but mostly Balkan) intellectual heritage, and pursuing instead a European cultural integration path. Along with a classic Marxist episteme, the area-specific and contemporary CRK also downsized since it obviously overlapped with all the above “three antis” (*san fan*). The usefulness of research on China’s non-alignment policy or Marxist interpretations of its ongoing economic reforms abruptly disappeared, but were not replaced by many other new topics. This vacuum was filled with commercialized, digested and often superficial representations of CRK, which gave a more transitional flavor to the new pragmatic turn. In the next fifteen years, a shortlist of Croatian CRK publications unavoidably included topics such as *feng shui*, martial arts, Chinese ancient wisdom, Chinese cooking mastery, etc., that were typically explained in plain language, using a casual style or first-person narrative.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, reflecting contemporary trends, CRK became more children-friendly: translations of general history, ancient civilizations, world wonders, and natural beauties together with signature vignettes and stories beyond the Great Wall or the Forbidden City aimed to familiarize schoolchildren with CRK.<sup>25</sup>

As Croatian CRR alienated itself from past commonplaces it shared with its object of research, the influx of Western-mediated CR knowledge complemented existing research interests. According to titles published in the 2000s, general history with either ancient or modern focus was a prized topic. To the ancient camp belong *Drevna Kina: od prvih početaka do Carstva* (*La Chine ancienne*, Zagreb, 2008) by Jacques Grenet, and *Drevna Kina* by Edward Shaughnessy (*Ancient China*, Zagreb, 2008). Both authors start with the Neolithic period and emphasize the Qin unification and centralization of Empire in 221 BC. The Post-Han period, as a tacit convention, tends to be either deemphasized in accounts on Chinese ancient history, or ‘medievalized’ following Western periodization. On the other hand, a book that stays closer to the Chinese understanding of the modern period is *History of Modern China* by Jonathan Fenby, published in Croatian as *Povijest suvremene Kine: propast i uzdizanje velike sile, 1850–2008* (*History of Contemporary China: Downfall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850–2008*, Zagreb, 2008). This book views China through the narratives of victimhood and rejuvenation as it

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<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed list, see bibliography. Honorable exception to this was the translation of Laozi’s *Daodejing* in 1994, and the publication of the first integral version of Confucius’ *Analects*. See: Lao 1994; Konfucije 1995. Also, despite its worn-out title that mimics a new-age publicist work, *Mudrosti Kine i Japana* (*Wisdoms of China and Japan*, Zagreb, 1999) by Slovene Sinologist Maja Milčinski stands as a fair introduction to Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example: Storm 2002; Carpanetto, Bianchini 2000; Burnie 2007; Dineen 2007.

frames modern times with, on the one hand, the collapse of ‘the oldest empire in human history’ and, on the other, the birth of a world power embodied in communist China.

A particular phenomenon that impacted the development of China Studies within the European academia is the Americanization of political CRK. As a result of China’s global impact and the growing perception of China as the main challenger to the US-led unipolar international configuration, the ‘US-China competition’, ‘Chinese global predominance’, ‘multipolar vs. unipolar international order’ have overtaken all other subtopics of political CRR. Such reduced scope of research interest stemmed from particular attention that US-China competition was for a long time receiving within the US intellectual circles. Its spillover to Europe can partially be explained with the exodus of geopolitical paradigm in the European IR circles after the Fifth enlargement integrationist enthusiasm, and topical domination of normative power Europe. For the popular geopolitics before Maidan, Trump, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, one of the rare interesting yet relevant playgrounds was the topic of US-China competition. Moreover, many European publicists, if they had not already been affected, now came under the influence of neorealist thinking, geostrategic conceptualizations (and simplifications) of IR, democratization theory and various theories of globalization, which also made an imprint on the methodology and configuration of research questions. Although a mix of all these approaches remained in journalistic accounts and expert analyses, it did not leave a large footprint on translated literature. Besides Brzezinski’s *Velika šahovska ploča: američki primat i njegovi geostrateški imperativ* published in 2000 (*The Great Chessboard*, Zagreb, 2000), some more openly conspiracist books came out: *Uništite Kinu: što Washington čini da ograniči utjecaj Kine u svijetu* by Frederick Engdahl (*Target: China*, Zagreb, 2014), and *Stogodišnji maraton*, a book about Chinese grand strategy by Michael Pillsbury (*The Hundred Year Marathon*, Zagreb, 2018) that caught some attention. But besides these, not many other titles were published; it seems that Croatian professional communities in this regard had already switched to English sources.<sup>26</sup>

Another CRK branch might be called opportunistic, not least because the word ‘opportunity’ in these books is probably the most used one. Among business strategists, tech gurus and successful managers preaching on the advent of the Asian century, great transformation of the economic models, global supply chains etc., Omae Ken’ichi’s *Nova globalna pozornica: izazovi i prilike u svijetu bez gra-*

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<sup>26</sup> Along with changing patterns in reception of CRK issues, one may argue the presence of the Americanized perspective in translations of Chinese modern literature. In the first two decades of this century, dissident literature, topics related to the Cultural Revolution period, and authors censored by the Chinese authorities, led the way in translation publications. An additional trait in translation is the presence of religious literature (underground Christian, Falun Gong) censored or forbidden in China. See Bibliography.

nica (*The Next Global Stage, Challenges and Opportunities in our Borderless World*, Zagreb, 2007), and Jeffery Sachs' *Kraj siromaštva: ekonomske mogućnosti našeg doba (Economic Possibilities for our Time*, Zagreb, 2007.) introduced China's economic miracle as a new model of economic development and an aspiring motor for global economic transformation.

The late 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s was a time when globalization made a full turn in professional and academic circles,<sup>27</sup> where China's economic impact and expanding global role were perceived as fully converging to this globalization hype. Chinese foreign political initiatives, especially the regionally bound 16+1, had already been known for a while and enthusiasm to get a piece of the 'cooperation cake' with China could be sensed in academic circles in many European countries, albeit without a critical or skeptical perspective. As was mentioned before, during this period Croatia retained a somewhat outsider position, feeling that the Chinese 'arrival' was happening everywhere but in Croatia. In these circumstances, *Kina na Balkanu (China in the Balkans*, Zagreb, 2013) by Jasna Plevnik et al. captures the momentum of catching up with stories on lucrative investments and cooperation plans coming from China. Besides, this book goes beyond economic argumentation in explaining China's continuous double-digit economic success, providing a fairly comprehensive account of China's flagship outbound frameworks (Belt and Road Initiative) as well as geo-economic opportunities for the Balkans demand-side in engaging in Chinese regional and global initiatives.

In this period Croatian CRK also became self-reflective. Chinese international influence, along with the growing impact of cultural-diplomacy, urged many transitional countries to reconsider historical contacts and common points of interaction with China beyond those from the socialist era. For Croatia, rebranding Marco Polo as one of the earliest persons that served as a 'bridge' between European and Chinese civilizations was a natural choice. By 2004, his *Il Milione* was re-translated into Croatian; several movies, historical and travel documentaries based on or imitating his travelogue have appeared since.<sup>28</sup> Research on his life, work and intercultural impact not only became a meeting point for historians, travel writers, anthropologists and archeologists, but has also pushed the research on other historical figures from the 'prehistoric' period of Croatian CRK. In 2009, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts published Štampar's travel diaries (*Dnevnik s putovanja 1931–1938*, Zagreb, 2009) for the first time to commemorate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. The diary was written in the period between 1931 and 1938, and the part on China serves as an important testimony about famous

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<sup>27</sup> For example: Veselica, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example: Boko 2009; Veličan 2009. For literary works inspired by *Il milione*, see: Horvat 2012; Horvat 2016.



politicians, scientists and diplomats during the Second Sino-Japanese war. Reception of Grgurić's *Na Dalekom istoku* passed a full circle, from pioneering fascination to political indignation; by 2008, when his work reappeared, the 'pre-revolutionary' period of his travelogue had already acquired certain vintage status.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond pragmatic or nostalgic considerations, the self-reflective stage also brought forth Sinology-building efforts. The body of thought brought over to Croatia by professionals returning from China, CRK enthusiasts, and resident *les savants Orientalistes*, laid academic foundations and topical trajectory to Croatian Sinology. This was not a highly structured bequest of the 1980s philosophical "West-Rest" debate; rather, throughout the 1990-2005 period it struggled to keep pace with expanding scholarship on post-colonial theory and global cultural anthropology, taking a certain interest in curtailing the socialist episteme with more relevant cultural comparativist approaches. The Croatian translation of *Filozofija i Zhexue (Philosophy and Zhexue. The Way to the Other and Back)*, Zagreb, 2006) by Chinese philosopher Wu Xiaoming appeared as a critical edition, appended with texts by Mario Rebac (foreword and the periodization of Chinese philosophy), Zorana Baković: "Puna praznina između dlanova" ("Full Emptiness between Palms") and Karmen Šterk: "Filozofija u prizmi antropologije" ("Philosophy in the Prism of Anthropology"). It built up momentum for a cross-disciplinary discussion on the concepts of the "Other" and Derridean *différance*, still in the academic limelight at the time. Wu's contribution in revolutionizing *Dao* in deconstructing hierarchical patterns of interpretation of intellectual heritage of the East, possibly exceeding *différance* in such endeavor, was also the subject of subsequently published reviews (Buljan 2008: 987–989; Mikulić 2012: 179–185). But even though Croatian Sinology was certainly philosophical in its immediate origins,<sup>30</sup> it also reflected decades of institutional and academic closeness with Croatian Indology. The center of academic gravity showed a distinct tendency to move towards philological approaches. For over ten years the publications of *Bibliotheca Orientalica*, a book series of Hrvatsko filološko društvo (Croatian Philological Society, headed by Zdravka Matišić) published several translations and monographs on Chinese art, poetry and philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Among one of CRK publications is *Nedosanjana Kina, I-II (Undreamt China I-II)*, Zagreb, 2012–14) a two-tome volume written by Branko Merlin.<sup>32</sup> It represents a pioneering attempt to provide a scholarly introduction to modern Chinese literature, literary criticism, translation

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<sup>29</sup> Grgurić 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Philosophical CRK was the topic of two special issues of *Synthesis Philosophica*, a journal of Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo (Croatian Philosophical Society), See: Buljan, Babel 2014, Sernelj 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Other CRR publications of *Bibliotheca Orientalica* include: Ai 2002; Malić 2002; Valentić 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Merlin was among the first Yugoslav students sent to China following the Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement. For details on student exchanges, see: Radović 2021: 243.

issues and cultural history, and serves as a starting point for Croatian literary CRR.<sup>33</sup>

Lastly, there were authors whose CRR contribution may be considered as a residuum of the past stage, but they came to full bloom after the pragmatic turn. To them, China was either a career-long preoccupation or a significant other in their professional undertakings and they continued to combine socialist and contemporary (relevant) approaches to CRK. Among them, Ivo Dragičević and Dara Janeković could be considered the most relevant historical figures, because they also laid the groundwork for political and social approaches in Croatian Sinology. Ivo Dragičević's seminal book *Kina: od nebeskog carstva do naših dana* (*China: From Heavenly Empire to our Days*, Zagreb, 2002) is a comprehensive monograph on CR encyclopedic knowledge and occupies a central place in the Croatian CRR scholarship. Dragičević's scientific-popular style and wide range of topics based on his experiences while serving in the Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce in China (1970–1975) make this monograph interesting not only to Sinologists but also highly inviting to non-professionals. Janeković's journalistic records, letters to public figures, diaries and interviews accumulated during her correspondent career have been published in several books, tracing an evolution of the Cold War perceptions of China to globalist and opportunist perspectives that arrived with the new century.<sup>34</sup>

## Concluding Remarks and the Current Stage of Croatian CRR

This article was an attempt to provide an overview of the key people, topics and conceptualizations of Croatian CRR over the last century. It also identified some of the most significant 'prehistoric' contributors to Croatian CRR, developments in the historiography of Croatian vis-à-vis general CRR trends, the major areas of thematic research, and trajectories of specific CRR topics over time.

Considering the geographical distance, asymmetrical intercultural influences and slow-paced institutionalization of the Croatian CRR, it is fascinating to trace significant moments, historical trends and persons that have constituted the commonplaces of academic and scholarly interaction between China and Croatia. Our journey of CRR's historical development started with Marco Polo, patriarch of intercultural exchanges between China and the West, whose position in Croatian CRR did not only stem from the happenstance of his geographical origins but was

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<sup>33</sup> Even though he has no CRK publications, Josip Sever, a poet and Beijing-educated Sinologist should be listed as an honorary member. Although his life and work fully correspond to the "red" phase, recent attention for his China episode should earn him the title of a 'Sinologist without portfolio'.

<sup>34</sup> Besides *Veliki mir*, she also published: Janeković 1987; Janeković 2003.

historically construed as part of Croatian intellectual and cultural heritage. Historical figures like Ivan Ureman, Sava Lukić Vladislavić-Raguzinski, and Franjo Luka Jelačić also prove that Croatian CRK constituted a significant part in Sino-Western scientific and political interactions.

Along with a growing scholarly interest in distant Asian cultures, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Classical Sinology was succeeded by a broader interest in traditional Chinese culture. In this way, it gave the Western episteme an inexhaustible source of research potential and – as it was underpinned in post-colonialist critique – it provided the progressive and technically superior Western Europe with an “other”, conceptualized in the opposite terms. Croatian CRR only scratched the surface of this narrative formation through Oriental representations of inland China in Grgurić’s travel writings and the progressive optimism of Štampar’s diary. China from this ‘innocent’ phase was characterized by estrangement and fascination, both stemming from an unexpected contact with traditional Chinese culture. CRR disciplines from that period were likewise based on the presumption of epistemological submission of the traditional and its openness towards Western modernization projects. Therefore, China was perceived as a backward country craving for modernization, yet it was understood that it should follow the established path and pace of modernization. Optimism for such endeavor was relative to the ignorance of the magnitude and depth of the impact of the traditional.

After WWII and the establishment of the People’s Republic, Croatian CRR headed towards diversification of research topics, all having strong political dependence on political relations between China and Yugoslavia. After Soviet-styled research approaches, Croatian CRR matured alongside the advancing complexity of Sino-Yugoslav political and ideological battles. In the late 1950s, it gathered new momentum with significant impact on Yugoslav conceptualizations of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence. Despite China’s isolationism during the Cultural Revolution, Yugoslav CRR was trying to keep pace with its rapid changes; besides the obvious domination of the political CRR, travelogues focusing on social and everyday China were published as well. The period that produced the most interaction coincided with the Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement in the advent of the Reform and Opening Up period. Although the knowledge transfer fostered by warming up of bilateral relations tended to lean more on the Chinese side, in Yugoslavia there occurred an exponential growth rate of media, professional and academic publications on CRK, indicating that CRR had opened more diverse research avenues.

However, Eastern Europe’s systemic transformation after 1989 discontinued the development of political CRR. The 1990s saw Croatian CRK gathering new momentum, with a significant turn to popular knowledge, not just in terms of publication output, but also through diversification of topics and a certain methodological pluralism. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a shift towards geopolitical contextualization of Chinese history and geography, followed

by accounts of economic opportunities ‘promised’ by the Chinese global and regional cooperation initiatives. Throughout this stage, Croatia also maintained the CRR heritage and became more self-reflective, mostly through the work of professional enthusiasts who provided foundational contributions to Croatian CRR.

In the third decade of this century, Croatian CRR has made further advancements in its institutionalization, showing, tentatively, three distinct CRR tendencies. Along with the establishment of the full-fledged Sinology study (for undergraduate and graduate students), and creation of the Research Section at the University of Zagreb, institutional Sinology started fostering original scientific research through interactions beyond the Croatian academic communities.<sup>35</sup> But, as was mentioned earlier, due to the long process of institutionalization, it developed mainly in one, philological direction.<sup>36</sup> However, some courses and Croatian professors maintained active links with philosophical CRK. For example, a distinctive link with the philosophical CRK heritage can be seen in the work of Ivana Buljan, who has been teaching a course on Classical Chinese Philosophy for years, and has provided relevant academic contributions, such as the first critical translation and philological and philosophical reconstruction of one of the most important pre-modern Chinese texts, the *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals (On Maintaining Power)* (Religa 2002: 502; Buljan 2020: 14-21; Buljan 2021).<sup>37</sup> Besides the Sinology Department at the University of Zagreb, professional and academic breakthrough in addressing CRK and its global and regional impact has been noticed in the work of several research institutes established after 2015. CroAsia Institute of the Zagreb School of Economy and Management is a Croatian home institution of several China-affiliated historians, archeologists, IR researchers and economists. Their member Zvonimir Stopić coauthored with Goran Đurđević a monograph on China’s history and archeology *Svila, zmajevi i papir (Silk, Dragons and Paper, Zagreb, 2021)*,<sup>38</sup> and both authored and co-

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<sup>35</sup> Sinology section gathers scholars and researchers who received advanced training and doctorates from respectable Sinology centers (Ghent, Taipei, Bochum, Beijing, Wuhan), and some of whom (Ivana Buljan) contributed to the establishment of the European Association of Chinese Philosophy (see: European Association of Chinese Philosophy: <https://www.ea-cp.eu/> (May, 16, 2024)). Also, in 2013 the first PhD thesis on Chinese philosophy *Elements of the syncretist tradition in the Chunqiu Fanlu's chapters on the theory of rulership* was defended at the University of Zagreb (Buljan 2013).

<sup>36</sup> It developed in one direction, but fostered heterogeneous topics and cross-cultural comparativist approaches, as in the case of academically multilingual Sinologist and Koreanist Ivana Gubić: Gubić 2013: 89–95; Gubić 2017: 5–7; Gubić 2021; Gubić, Parać Lakić 2023: 173-194. Interdisciplinary approach (cognitive linguistics and literary theory) in work of Mojca Pretnar: Pretnar 2015: 161-185; Pretnar 2015b: 23-42; Pretnar 2015c: 167-188; Pretnar 2019: 601-624. Links to religious science: Buljan 2022. <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/84264> (May 23, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Besides Buljan 2024 and Buljan 2008, see for example: Buljan 2009: 485-503; Buljan 2020: 289-305; Buljan 2021: 65-87.

<sup>38</sup> Stopić, Đurđević 2021.

authored several books and articles on CR Cold War history with specific focus on Sino-Yugoslav relations.<sup>39</sup>

The third tendency might be said to encompass the cross-disciplinary, general paradigmatic changes in perception and (scientific or popular) approach to CRK.<sup>40</sup> Here, politics again seems to lead the way. The Pelješac Bridge construction project, launched in 2018 and completed in 2022, was followed by more intensive inter-governmental contacts. Croatia hosted the 16+1 summit in 2018; it was described as the “diamond stage” of Sino-Croatian bilateral relations in high-level exchanges before the pandemics. Along with this, it may be argued that Croatian identity as an EU member has been internationally affirmed through cooperation with China. The EU accession or completion of the EU integration process served as a dialectical moment towards full globalization, and it transcended the strong academic and cultural focus on blind convergence with European identity in global interactions. Sino-Croato-European ‘triply beneficial’ cooperation may stand out as a unique example of Croatian post-accession global actorness (Bakota et al. 2023: 239–262). The discursive conjunction of Croatian post-accession globalization, Chinese regional cooperation initiatives and the ‘return of geopolitics’ in Europe after the start of the Ukrainian war (2022) also prompted journalists, researchers and scientists to be mainly concerned with the standardization of the political CRK in a new international context, grappling with different narrative registers and providing ‘dictionaries’ of political CRK that do not only offer one-sided descriptions. A pending task for the generation of Sinologists and CRR professionals that are coming of age now is not only to acquire a full set of globalized CRR narratives and stay updated with new trends, but also to rekindle its localization that would reflect the history of Croatian CRK.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See: Stopić 2022; Bakota, Stopić 2024; Stopić et al. 2023; for work on contemporary political CRK and particular reflections on resilient heritage of socialist CRK in constituting contemporary discussions on political CRK, see: Bakota 2024: 143-156.

<sup>40</sup> At this point, we should acknowledge the contribution of CRR academic diaspora whose representatives have either made first academic steps into CRR through Croatian CRR communities or have maintained close connections with them. Among a (likely) more extensive list of CRR contributors, Tania Becker (sociology, art history, AI) and Emina Popović (political research) stand out in contemporary CRR, see: Bibliography.

<sup>41</sup> N.B. This paper and the list below do not pretend to cover all the CRR work. Books and monographs that only remotely or incidentally touch upon CRR for obvious reasons could not be included. In the same sense, only (scholarly) articles that have made significant contribution to CRR are listed, or otherwise the list would swell to the size of a phonebook. Expanding multidisciplinary and multimedia CRR work that especially comes to the fore in the last stage unfortunately could not be comprehensively covered, since some of the works have either not yet been recognized as important or have simply passed under the radar. The author expects (and hopes) the list will need to be updated in few years.

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## SAŽETAK

### PREGLED RAZVOJA HRVATSKOG ISTRAŽIVANJA I ZNANJA O KINI

Članak daje pregled važnih autora i tema u kontekstu hrvatskih istraživanja i znanja o Kini tijekom prošlog stoljeća. Prva mu je zadaća ukazati na neke od najvažnijih hrvatskih „pretpovijesnih“ istraživača Kine, a potom izdvojiti glavne istraživačke etape kroz 20. stoljeće te istaknuti određene specifičnosti (ne zaboravljajući pritom spomenuti i svjetski relevantne studije) vezane za istraživanje Kine. S obzirom na promjenu znanstveno-istraživačkih paradigmi, evoluciju istraživačkih interesa te akademsku kompartmentalizaciju hrvatskog istraživanja o Kini, članak razlikuje pet ključnih razdoblja hrvatskih istraživanja o Kini: „pretpovijesno razdoblje“ prije Prvog svjetskog rata, „doba nevinosti“ između dva svjetska rata, „crveno“ razdoblje Hladnog rata, razdoblje nakon „pragmatičnog obrata“ 1991. godine, te – uvjetno rečeno – novo, suvremeno razdoblje koje započinje u drugom desetljeću 21. stoljeća. Rad također donosi popis knjiga, monografija, članaka te prijevoda vezanih za Kinu a objavljenih u Hrvatskoj u posljednjih stotinjak godina.

Ključne riječi: recepcija Kine u Hrvatskoj, istraživanje o Kini, znanje o Kini, sinologija, kineski studiji, razvoj istraživačkih paradigmi o Kini