

INSTITUTIONALIZING ‘CHINESE STUDIES’ IN COLD WAR ROMANIA. AN EMPIRICAL RETROSPECTIVE INTO THE 1950s

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Abstract. This position paper intends to highlight a brief introduction of the inaugural two-way university-level exchange of students between Romania and China (during 1950-1956) which have taken place in a binary system of international relations. Data presented in this position paper is recorded under an extensive process regarded as ‘intergenerational dialogues’.

Keywords: *Romanian-Chinese two-way university-level exchanges; Romanian-Chinese relations in the Cold War; Historiography; Intergenerational dialogues; Practical knowledge-building processes; Cold War History*

*Wholeheartedly dedicating this to Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura, Romania's first female China historian, diplomat, author; the frontrunner of Romanian Sinology, tirelessly conducting research on China for more than 70 years.
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I have been fascinated by the trajectory of Romanians that studied in China since I was in my adolescence out of sheer curiosity. And perhaps not necessarily being fully aware back then of the historical dimension of two-way university-level exchanges between Romania and China, I tried to gradually explore and extend my horizons in the following years. Accordingly, it was only in 2018 whilst being a graduate student at China's Tsinghua University in Beijing when I *finally* had the opportunity to meet two of the first five Romanian students that have studied during the 1950s in China¹. That particular moment opened an important chapter in my life and, retrospectively assessing, it contributed fundamentally to my growth, personally and professionally; it was the moment when I faced what could be considered as ‘history in history’. Indeed, that assumption still guides me to this day in assessing the dimension of historical precedent and determining a *modus operandi* in terms of maintaining resourcefulness in one of Romania's traditional China-related academic institution through what could be generically regarded as *intergenerational dialogues*.

This position paper aims to present several aspects related to the evolution of *institutionalised* Chinese studies in Romania, a process initiated in the aftermath

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¹ His Excellency Romulus Ioan Budura (1931-2021), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the People's Republic of China (1990-1995), and Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura (née Szász in 1931).

of the Second World War that – as generally agreed upon – concluded towards the end of the 1950s. In this regard, it is important to point out that this paper is structured on an anthology that draws parallels among *a cause* that has determined *factual effects* as well as empirical evidence recorded through oral history, and compiled pieces of information both published and unpublished previously. Therefore, this position paper conceptually highlights those factual effects that determined an inaugural two-way university-level exchanges of students between Romania and China.

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It is essential to note that Romania was not the first country to have been initially included on Zhou Enlai's list to participate in the inaugural university-level exchanges between China and several Central and Eastern European countries. In fact, it has been pointed out that Poland had an initial request to which "similar signals had been sent from Czechoslovakia, but the Chinese translated the initiative into practice in an unprecedented manner: not only did they respond affirmatively to Poland and Czechoslovakia, but they considered to be appropriate the involvement of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary as well"². Moreover, once invited countries selected their students (which have arrived at different intervals, several months apart each group³), Romania "was the only country, among those invited, that sent people solely with secondary education" – Romulus Ioan Budura (born in 1931), Anna Eva Budura (née Szász in 1931), Maria Comănescu (born in 1930), Toni Radian (born in 1929) and Leonin Vasilescu (born in 1930)⁴.

Conceptually assessing, it could be argued that the Second World War (nonetheless understood as a theoretically-inflicted *cause* in this paper) determined a first factual *effect*, namely that communist parties took control of political power in both Central and Eastern Europe and China, among others. This indicates a second factual *effect* that revolves around the idea according to which having merely control over political affairs was not enough by the end of the 1940's; it implied the initiation of a process that would consolidate this control. Hence, once in government, communist parties, just like any other political party, would resort to diplomacy to consolidate and – more extensively – to coordinate their power from within a binary system of international relations. Arguably enough, this consolidation implies a third factual *effect*: once diplomacy had been put at use, exchanges were indissoluble for the initiation and subsequent survival of the state through cooperation, appealing to an external political spectrum that

² Radu Sava, "70 years of Romanian-Chinese Academic Exchanges (1950-2020): Dialogues with Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura", in *Romanian Review of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2020, p. 245.

³ Romanian students arrived on 26 November 1950 in Manzhouli (see Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 245), although others noted that the precise date is 30 November 1950 (see Ding Chao, "China și România: 70 de ani de colaborare în educație" [China and Romania: 70 years of collaboration in education], <https://www.contemporanul.ro/romanii-de-pretutindeni/china-si-romania-70-de-ani-de-colaborare-in-eduatie.html>, accessed 01 August 2022); they have begun their studies at Tsinghua University on 4 December 1950 (see Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 245). Bulgarian and Hungarian students arrived in China sometime during December 1950, whilst Polish students in February 1951 and Czechoslovakian students in September 1951 (see Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 256).

⁴ Author interview with Anna Eva Budura on 22 July 2022. The names of the above-mentioned are sorted in alphabetical order. Meanwhile, on 6 September 1950, Li Xiling, Zhao Shengzhen, Qiu Zuti, Guo Junqing and Liu Jixin embarked on their journey to Romania (see Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe/ AMAE), fond *Telegrame, Pekin*, September-December, 1950, unpaginated, cited in Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 256).

ideologically was similar. These exchanges essentially originated from the idea that experts and specialists *were needed* in order to “facilitate bilateral contacts”⁵ and expand *state-to-state* cooperation in its entirety, across vast areas of interest.

From the perspective of historiography and practical knowledge-building processes, Romania’s case is particular. Romulus Ioan Budura, Maria Comănescu, Toni Radian, Anna Eva Budura and Leonin Vasilescu – all of which were in their early adulthood at the time – completed a specially-designed Chinese language programme at Tsinghua University between 1950-1952, chiefly under the supervision of Deng Yi 邓懿⁶. After completion, all of them were assigned to attend undergraduate programmes at two designated Chinese universities (1952-1956) and were, immediately after graduation, employed at Romanian public institutions as follows:

| Name ⁷ | Designated university ⁸ | Field of study (at undergraduate level, 1952-1956) | Institutional affiliation (after 1956) |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Romulus Ioan Budura | Peking University | Chinese Language and Literature | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Embassy of the Romanian People’s Republic in Beijing ⁹) |
| Anna Eva Budura | Peking University | Chinese History | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Embassy of the Romanian People’s Republic in Beijing ¹⁰) |
| Maria Comănescu | Peking University ¹¹ | Chinese History | Ministry of Cults (Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) |
| Toni Radian | Peking University | Chinese Language and Literature | Ministry of Public Education (University of Bucharest) |
| Leonin Vasilescu | Renmin University | Commerce/Economic Studies | Ministry of Exterior Commerce (Beijing Office) |

Table 1. *Furthering University education for the first Romanian students in China, after completing two years of Chinese language training at Tsinghua University, and their subsequent employment, in accordance with the agreement between the Governments of the Romanian People’s Republic and the People’s Republic of China and internal procedures of the Romanian People’s Republic (See Radu Sava, quoted work, 2020, p. 246 & p. 259)*

With all things considered, three of the most important ‘intergenerational’ paradigms that have been passed on since the 1950’s include (1) differentiating (in Romania) between *Hanxue* (*Sinologie*) and *Zhongguo xue* (*studii chineze*)¹²,

⁵ Radu Sava, *quoted work.*, 2020, p. 256.

⁶ Deng Yi was a founding professor of the new science that took shape in China in the 1950s, that of teaching Chinese to foreign nationals. Author interview with Anna Eva Budura on 22 July 2022.

⁷ In alphabetical order.

⁸ As scholars of the Romanian Government, according to the bilateral Romanian-Chinese Agreement at the time.

⁹ It is notable to point out that Romulus Ioan Budura became an Ambassador of Romania to Beijing (1990-1995), being the first Romanian Ambassador that was fluent in Chinese. Author interview with Anna Eva Budura, 22 July 2022.

¹⁰ After working for a decade at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anna Eva Budura obtained a PhD in History at the Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies. She defended her thesis, entitled “The Anti-Japanese Resistance Struggle of the Chinese People: 1931-1945”, on 27 December 1982. She continued to work for the Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies until her retirement in 1990. In a similar fashion, some have subsequently had different career trajectories at other Romanian institutions, though actively being engaged with China. See Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 247.

¹¹ “Due to health problems, she [Maria Comănescu] remained in Romania in 1954, being unable to complete her undergraduate studies at Peking University”. See Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 259.

¹² See Radu Sava, *quoted work*, 2020, p. 254.

(2) assessing the unique character of high-level personal relations between Romanian and Chinese leaders alike¹³ and (3) understanding the essentiality of 'polity' and 'policy'. The latter, for example, has demonstrated a correlational model of refurbishing expertise into scholarship across decades in an unstructured and very natural way of interpretation.

Regarding the extensive debate surrounding the notion of *intergenerational dialogues*, it is important to highlight that most substantiated research on China (from the perspective of cultural, historical and political axioms) is a product of the first generation of Romanian Sinologists and genuine China connoisseurs. For this reason, it is indicative to point out that extensive research within the Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs *inter alia* confirms that these sustained efforts of practical knowledge-building processes have existed, after processing declassified documents. Could these paradigms be regarded as such in the future, since they have become by now part of *the greater* Romanian historiography, despite being politically assessed on grounds of past ideology rather than scientifically evaluated?

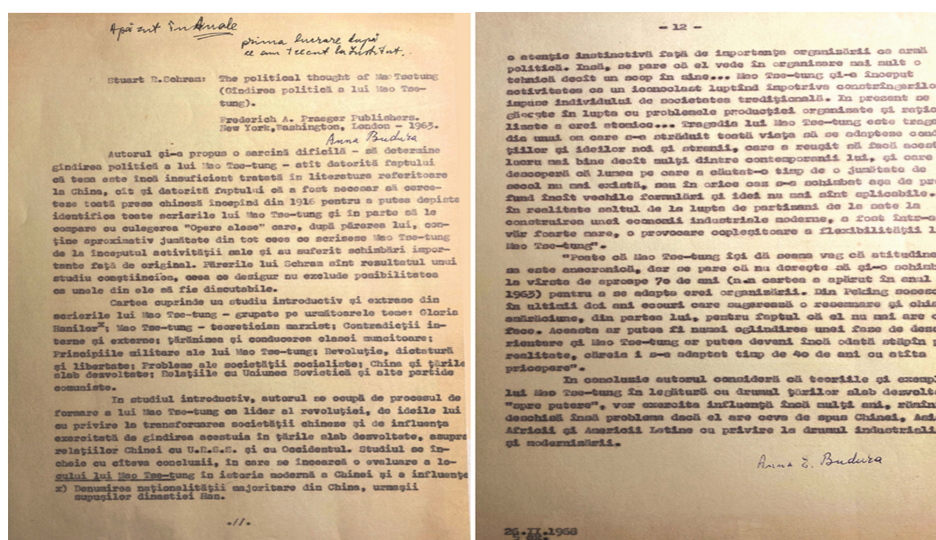


Figure 2. The first and last pages of a 12-page book review authored by Anna Eva Budura (26 February 1968) at the Institute for Historical and Socio-Political Studies, based on Stuart Schram's "The political thought of Mao Tse-tung" (New York: Praeger, 1963, ix, 319 pages). This book review broadly marks the beginning of shifting Romania's China-approach from the level of 'expertise' (connoisseurs) to sophisticated and scientifically-elaborated approaches (scholarship)

Source: Personal archive of Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura

¹³ For further reference, see Radu Sava, "Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura and His Contributions to Elevating Romanian-Chinese relations (In Memoriam) in *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* vol. 19, no. 1, 2022, pp. 3-9; Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura* [Reflections on Romanian-Chinese relations at 70 years of diplomatic rapports: Conversations with His Excellency Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura], Sibiu: Lucian Blaga University Press, 2020, p. 195.

Indeed, some inquiries are still left without precise analyses. Have Romanians become generally able to assert that the post-Second World War context created the premises of institutionalising 'Chinese studies' as part of a programme that meant the survival of the Romanian state in a binary system of international relations? Are Romanian academic institutions ready to explore shifting dynamics in the preeminent world beyond the conventional geographical points of reference? Why do impromptu conflicts determine one's policy into polity?

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