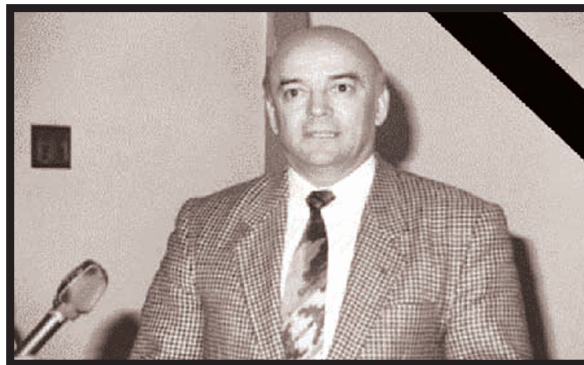


*POLITICAL IMAGE, THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY*

**AMBASSADOR ROMULUS IOAN BUDURA  
AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO ELEVATING  
ROMANIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS (IN MEMORIAM)**

**RADU SAVA\***



**Abstract.** This essay is an expression of reverence to His Excellency Romulus Ioan Budura (1931-2021), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the People's Republic of China (1990-1995) and Consul General of Romania to Sydney (1969-1972). It represents a partial reprint of *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, published in 2020 at Sibiu's Lucian Blaga University Press, as well as an attempt to conceptualise his contributions to elevating Romanian-Chinese relations. Essentially, the essay highlights Ambassador Budura's accomplishments and achievements as a Romanian Sinologists, diplomat, researcher and author, both at home and abroad.

**Keywords:** *China; Romania; Romulus Ioan Budura; In Memoriam; Romanian-Chinese Relations*

*Prologue*

*I have had the opportunity to meet His Excellency in 2018 while being a graduate student at China's Tsinghua University in Beijing. It was astonishing*

---

\* PhD candidate in History, University of Bucharest, Romania; ionut-radu.sava@drd.unibuc.ro.

for me to be able to interact directly with one of the first sinologists Romania has offered. I must confess that this very first encounter has determined me to be more aware of the importance of the history that both Romania and China share. Beyond doubt, this encounter has left me with a deep impression that is shaping my prospects regarding China to this day.

I recall his voice being stout as he eagerly shared his thoughts, experience and knowledge – all of which now is rendered in the first book dedicated to Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura to have ever been published in Romania. In line with this, I ought to assert that Ambassador Budura understood the complex dynamics of today's world as well as the challenges that many of us face in attempting to illustrate through research and reflections what it entails to be genuinely preoccupied with China-related studies.

Sitting for hours on various occasions in front of private documents, photographs, letters or books has made me realise how dedicated Ambassador Budura was to elevating the study and research of China in Romania. To his family and, above all, to his distinguished spouse, Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura, please accept my sincere condolences. His Excellency shall never be forgotten as his destiny shaped not merely the evolution of Romanian-Chinese relations, but also of many others... some of which are yet to come.

Bucharest, 26 July 2021

### Generic

Born in Northwest Romania on the 8 November 1931<sup>1</sup>, Romulus Ioan Budura is regarded as one of the most renowned Romanian Sinologists, diplomat, researcher and author, both at home and abroad. Seventy-one years later from the moment of arriving in the Chinese Capital and after a lifetime of serving in the Romanian diplomatic service, Ambassador Budura passed away on the 25 July 2021<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, this essay aims to represent an act of reverence in connection not only to his achievements and accomplishments as a top diplomat, but also in terms of the contributions brought to the establishment and emergence of the study of China in Romania.

To begin with, it is important to emphasize the fact that parts of this essay represent a partial reprint of *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*<sup>3</sup>, published in 2020 at Sibiu's Lucian Blaga University Press<sup>4</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> See Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2020, p. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> See Radu Sava, "In memoriam. E.S. Romulus Ioan Budura (1931-2021)", in *Cotidianul*, 28 July 2021, <https://www.cotidianul.ro/in-memoriam-e-s-romulus-ioan-budura-1931-2021/>.

<sup>3</sup> In translation *Reflections on Romanian-Chinese relations at 70 years of diplomatic rapports: Conversations with His Excellency Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura*.

<sup>4</sup> Radu Sava has full authorship rights of the above-mentioned book, in accordance with relevant legislation.

parts reprinted herein are indicated accordingly and have the purpose to cast a personal touch to this essay, yet without eroding any sort of academic axioms nor to diminish the initial input of the above-mentioned monograph. Broadly, this reprint comprises over 11 hours of tête-à-tête interviews conducted with His Excellency and his distinguished wife, Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura, herself a renowned Sinologist and the first historian to specialise in Chinese history in Romania<sup>5</sup>. The interviews conducted in mid-2018 with Ambassador Budura and Professor Dr. Budura remain relevant due to the fact that personal (hi)stories can have a substantial resolution on knowledge and knowledge assessment. Exclusively desiring to reproduce the interviews without any alteration or author-inflicted connotations, the original print presents *ad litteram* these complex dialogues in an unstructured form, despite being categorised in accordance with the subject and reordered chronologically. This endeavour results in systematic syntheses and anecdotes which cover a wide range of aspects related to China and Romanian-Chinese relations. However, given the fact that the book is exclusively published on paper in Romanian, this essay could represent a bridge in connecting those interested in the history of Romanian-Chinese relations and beyond. Conclusively, it is important to distinguish between the original print and this essay as the latter has become perhaps less methodological and more of essence.

### *Ad infinitum: Romulus Ioan Budura and China*

Studying Chinese at Tsinghua University (1950-1952), Ambassador Budura has been one of the first five Romanians to take part in the inaugural exchange programme between Romania and China<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, Ambassador Budura has been awarded a bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature at Peking University (1952-1956)<sup>7</sup>. During his formative years, Romulus Ioan Budura has joined Romania's diplomatic service at the Embassy of Romania in Beijing as a diplomatic attaché (1954-1959)<sup>8</sup>. Working his way through all the diplomatic ranks, either at the headquarters in Bucharest or in different other diplomatic positions at the Embassy of Romania in the People's Republic of China, Ambassador Budura strived for perfection, becoming later on head of the Consulate General of Romania in Sydney (1969-1972) and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in the People's Republic of China (1990-1995)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, pp. 89-218.

<sup>6</sup> For further reference regarding the inaugural bilateral academic exchanges between Romania and the People's Republic of China, see 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, pp. 244-245.

<sup>7</sup> For further reference, see Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, p. xxv.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 1. Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura with President Jiang Zemin  
(Beijing, 3 April 1993)



Source: Personal archive of Romulus Ioan and Anna Eva Budura. Reprinted in Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, p. 85.

His contributions to the advancement of Romanian-Chinese relations “remain today a testimony of an activity dedicated to understanding and studying Chinese culture, civilization and language in Romania...”<sup>10</sup>, Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura being a figure that has promoted intensely the study of China and contributed decisively to the emergence of a new discipline in Romania – Sinology. Nevertheless, Ambassador Budura has published a series of specialised studies, articles and essays regarding Chinese culture and Chinese politics as well as an impressive collection of volumes comprising archival documents (collected from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) related to Romanian-Chinese relations that span over a century<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 2. Romulus Ioan Budura, Minister-counsellor at the Embassy of Romania  
in Beijing (right), with China’s paramount leader Deng Xiaoping (left)  
(Beijing, 6 November 1980)



Source: Personal archive of Romulus Ioan and Anna Eva Budura. Reprinted in Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Conceptually debating, the role that Ambassador Budura withholds is related to “the perpetuation... of several dynamics”<sup>12</sup>. First, Romulus Ioan Budura, as a Sinologist and author, truly understood the nature of Chinese thought in all its stages of development. From a cognitive point of view, this has been of crucial importance because it had determined a mind-set that could easily keep up with the (new) nature of Chinese society after the Second World War. Indeed, this has proven to be a huge asset for Romanian-Chinese relations. Second, he was well aware of the importance of applying heuristic principles in his work. As a result, the genuine *guanxi* that has pioneered throughout decades of service are a testimony of a linear approach to developing Romanian-Chinese relations. In 2004, years after his retirement from the diplomatic service and while still active in the academia, Ambassador Budura asserted that “Frequent contacts between Romanian and Chinese leaders during that decade [1960’s] not only favours the establishment of close personal relations between them [the leaders], but also [the establishment of] a substantial exchange of information and opinions... [This] exchange will fertilize the political thought of the leaders of the two countries, increasing their chances of manifesting competence and authority in international affairs”<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 3. Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People’s Republic of China, together with Nicolae Ceaușescu and Romulus Ioan Budura (Bucharest, 1959)



*Nota Bene: Ambassador Budura (centre, between the two leaders) participates at this event as the official translator of the Romanian delegation. Source: Archives of the Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, fondul Fotografii, mapa I/166, cota 15/1959 [http://fototeca.iicr.ro/picdetails.php?p?picid=32742X1X62], retrieved on 29 September 2019 and reprinted in Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, p. 195.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Romulus Ioan Budura, “Aniversarea stabilirii relațiilor diplomatice între Republica Populară Română și Republica Populară Chineză”, in *Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice*, vol. I, no. 1, 2005, p. 48.

In addition, Ambassador Budura had been directly engaged in the making of Romanian-Chinese relations since 1954, thus his input giving “substance to bilateral relations”<sup>14</sup> – from being a translator for many high-level delegations, to having direct contact with China’s Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and many other Chinese officials as well as influencing fundamentally various bilateral agreements reached throughout the 1990’s<sup>15</sup>. Finally, his charisma and his flexibility, in line with his thorough acclimatization to Chinese customs, determined the forming of a diplomat that was agile and devoted to the service of Romania, despite the more recent challenges generated at the end of the last century<sup>16</sup>.

### *Quo vadis?*

Romulus Ioan Budura has been a fine connoisseur of China – an opener of new horizons in what constitutes China-related knowledge in Romania. Thus, his legacy is clear: despite those “varying experiences”<sup>17</sup> of a diplomat that sought to fulfil the role of a researcher and translator at times, it is unequivocal that Ambassador Budura incorporated the principle of continuity within the study of China in Romania<sup>18</sup> and within the circular paradigm of bilateral relations. In supporting these arguments, it remains certainly important to point out his desire to transfer knowledge and to develop a substantial inter-generational dialogue<sup>19</sup>. Without these two yearnings, the Chinese world would have been less known to the Romanian academia as well as to the public today. For this reason, his accomplishments and achievements should be perceived as part of a collective effort that seeks to contribute to the resourcefulness of Romania’s intellectual history with non-traditional geographic areas of reference. As a result, Romulus Ioan Budura, together with other Sinologists of his calibre, is an example that personal (hi)stories can have a substantial resolution on knowledge and knowledge assessment. An essential example of this had been illustrated in the following terms by Ambassador Budura himself: “Over the four decades [1949-1989], Romanian-Chinese relations have known a continuous development. There is no momentum of cooling down or deterioration in order to talk – as in the case of China’s relations with other Eastern European countries – about a period of their normalization. The explanation for this phenomenon, which the diplomacies of the two states can be proud of, lies in the scrupulousness with which the principles of independence, sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual benefit in relations between the two states had been respected. To this, we must add the esteem and trust that had been established

<sup>14</sup> Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> During Romulus Ioan Budura’s Ambassadorship, Romania and China signed an agreement to avoid double taxation and prevent tax evasion (1991) and an economic and trade agreement (1994). Moreover, the negotiations of another agreement, this time one tackling mutual protection of investments, were successfully completed (signed officially in 1997). For further reference, see Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>16</sup> See Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Radu Sava, “70 Years of Romanian-Chinese Academic Exchanges (1950-2020): Dialogues with Professor Dr. Anna Eva Budura”, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> For further reference, Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra..., op. cit.*, p. 88.

between the leaders of Romania and China. Romanians and Chinese have never been urged or incited to consider themselves opponents, much less enemies. On the contrary, they were advised to be treated with consideration and solidarity, to respect the values and interests of the partner nation. That is why, even if in those four decades ideological divergences and political differences appeared, they did not overshadow the whole of the Romanian-Chinese friendship and cooperation relations”<sup>20</sup>.

From an institutional perspective, Romulus Ioan Budura manages, together with his generation, to lay the foundation for a solid institutional memory regarding China. In other words, recollecting (hi)stories and experiences that span over 72 years of continuous diplomatic relations provides policy-making institutions in Romania the ability to comprehend certain reasons and arguments behind reactions, decisions or practices that had been taken in the past, some of which could be projected in the future.

In conclusion, Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura (1931-2021) remains, as he promoted throughout his tireless efforts the multifaceted study of China in Romania, one of the most prominent figures in elevating Romanian-Chinese relations. His contribution to the establishment of Sinology in Romania has a strong impact on a series of aspects related to China and, globally, to Asia. As portrayed from the very beginning of this essay, from the perspective of intellectual history and collective memory, (hi)stories have the potential to contribute substantially to knowledge and knowledge assessment within given time frames and specific geographic areas of reference. In this regard, his legacy is beyond the obvious and can be quantified in institutional settings, within the greater specialized literature or in foreign service.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Budura, Romulus Ioan, “Aniversarea stabilirii relațiilor diplomatice între Republica Populară Română și Republica Populară Chineză”, in *Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice*, vol. I, no. 1, 2005, pp. 45-50;
- Sava, Radu, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura*, Editura Universității Lucian Blaga Publishing House, Sibiu, 2020;
- Sava, Radu, “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, pp. 243-262;
- Sava, Radu, “In memoriam. E.S. Romulus Ioan Budura (1931-2021)”, in *Cotidianul*, 28 July 2021, <https://www.cotidianul.ro/in-memoriam-e-s-romulus-ioan-budura-1931-2021/>.

\*

*Nota bene: The original cover photo has been retrieved from the official website of the Embassy of Romania to the People's Republic of China and edited by the author subsequently. See <https://beijing.mae.ro/local-news/1430> [accessed 13 September 2021].*

<sup>20</sup> Romulus Ioan Budura, “Aniversarea stabilirii relațiilor diplomatice între Republica Populară Română și Republica Populară Chineză”, *op. cit.*, p. 49.