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Inspirations from Chinese Calligraphy and Daoist Thinking on Czech Visual Art, Poetry and Literature after 1948

My doctoral thesis seeks to explore some specific social aspects of the dialogue between traditional Chinese art and thinking and Czech art scene after the February 1948, when the Communist party took power in former Czechoslovakia. I am mainly interested in the problematic of inspiration from traditional Chinese calligraphy and Daoist philosophy on Czech painting, visual poetry and literature in the 1950s and 1960s. I will argue that the appropriation of selected Chinese philosophical and artistic themes helped Czech artists, working under the communist repression, to express their innermost human emotions in relation to home, culture, freedom, and one's artistic and human destiny.

Of crucial importance in this context is the first Czech translation of the classic Chinese Daoist text *Daodejing* (also known as *Laozi*) published as early as 1920. The significance of this ancient Chinese text went beyond the primary philosophical or philological considerations and throughout the 20th century it became for many figures on the Czech art scene an important means for getting over diverse national, political and personal traumas.

This phenomenon was further generalised by the complexity of the situation after the year 1948. The new communist regime meant to many artists the end of their official artistic career. Life in seclusion outside the main political and social streams became for some of them an opportunity to display pent-up feelings of affinity with the life stories of the ancient Daoist thinkers, poets and artists. In this context, focus is primarily placed on an analysis of several distinctive visual and literary works by Czech leading artists of the period, especially on the selected works by the visual artists Jiří Kolář (1914 – 2002), Jan Kotík (1916 – 2002) or Zdeněk Sklenář (1910 – 1986) and the famous Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal (1914 – 1997) and his world famous novel *Too Loud a Solitude* (Self-published in 1976).

Methodological approaches

From a methodological point of view my thesis focuses primarily on an interdisciplinary approach, which is based on an analysis of the interaction between philosophical text, poetry and visual art. One of the bases of this approach is a completely new visual, social and philosophical perception of written text or letter, whose full enforcing began in the late 1950s and during the 1960s. The written text often found itself in a dichotomous position, when on the one hand had a positive, informative function, but on the other hand began

to alienate from its original purpose and gained entirely new meanings revealing its irrational, misleading and enigmatic nature.

These new artistic approaches and possibilities were often inspired by Chinese (East-Asian calligraphic techniques. In this connection, I am interested particularly in the visual and literary works, in which the "calligraphic" image and sign or "calligraphic" gesture is dominating in the role of iconographic key to understanding of the fundamental philosophical problems of the period.