

# **Evaluation of the Research and Professional Activity of the Institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) for the period 2010–2014**

## **Final Report on the Evaluation of the Institute**

**Name of the Institute:** Oriental Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.

**Fields, in which the Institute registered its teams:**

Other humanities

Observer representing the Academy Council of the CAS: Lenka Vostrá

Observer representing the Institute: Jakub Hrubý, substitute observer Pavel Hons

**Commission No. 13: Humanities excluding disciplines 6.1 and 6.2**

Chair: Prof. Alessandro Ferrara Ph.D.

Date(s) of the visit of the Institute: October 27 - October 30, 2015

Programme of the visit of the Institute: see attached Minutes from the visit

Evaluated research teams:

*No. 1 - Department of the Middle East; No. 2 - Department of East Asia; No. 3 - Department of South Asia*

## **A. Evaluation of the Institute as a whole**

### **1. Introduction**

The Oriental Institute has undergone a drastic and difficult process of restructuring from which it has emerged as a small but vibrant unit that is functioning while partly still in the process of formation. The Institute has attracted international post-doc fellows and research grant money.

Researchers at the Oriental Institute produce high quality research published in English that is international competitive but feel simultaneously responsible to provide information to a wider Czech society on a more popular level. Beside research and outreach, many members also teach at universities, especially the FFUK, as without their activities many of the relevant disciplines would no longer be fully functional in the ČR.

The restructuring of the institute has been a largely successful process. Thus a fair assessment of the merits and still remaining weaknesses should disregard the first two years of the five-year-period in question and take only the time since 2013 into consideration as only then the Oriental Institute had been reconfigured as a functional unit.

Given the nature of research and publication in humanities that leads to longer cycles of output, to a publication culture favouring fewer but longer outputs and to a diversity of acknowledged forms of publication, bibliometrics are no adequate way of judging outcomes. The commission has therefore looked into the scholarly quality of outputs but put less emphasis on quantity and completely disregarded impact measurements.

### **2. Strengths and Opportunities**

The Institute has succeeded in integrating its activities into the relevant international research communities. It has attracted international PostDoc fellows. While no or few partner institutions exist in South Asia and the Middle East, the East Asian Studies team has initiated a close and regular cooperation with a partner in Taiwan and entertains strong relations with mainland Chinese institutions.

The Institute has attracted grant money especially for short term research projects. It also participates in some overarching research activities of the AVČR and has demonstrated potential for activities in digital humanities.

The research outputs of the members of the Oriental Institute (phase 1 of the evaluation) have all been ranked in the highest two echelons. The commission concurs with this evaluation and praises the quality of the research done. A small number of people has been able to cover an impressive array of research interests. The research foci of the institutes are well selected and include contemporary matters as well as basic research.

The Institute's scholarly journal, *Archiv Orientální* has found an international publisher and attracts contributions from all over the world. It is on the way to regain the position in the scholarly community it occupied a very long time ago. The popular journal *Nový Orient* is an important instrument in the outreach activities that are regarded as a central responsibility by at least all Czech members of the three teams (language barriers making such activities more difficult for international fellows). These activities also include presence in broadcast and print media and on other venues such as the production of language teaching material, books addressing a

general public etc. These activities are all the more important as Islamophobia has been reported to be widespread in the Czech Republic; general knowledge of East and South Asia, important economic and cultural partners of Europe is apparently weak in Czech society, as well.

Members of the Institute regularly teach at universities, mainly the FFUK, and are often decisive in upholding education in disciplines that otherwise would be endangered or no longer sustainable.

### **3. Weaknesses and Threats**

Members of all teams, but especially of the Middle Eastern and South Asian Departments are clearly disadvantaged in comparison to their international competitors as they do not receive travel funds on a regular or easily accessible basis. As the level of salaries is likewise not competitive, research trips to libraries and archives, field research and participation in international conferences are made very difficult. This situation is especially valid for the members of the Middle Eastern and South Asian teams for whom partner organisations in the region are not easily accessible.

Long term projects are made more difficult to pursue to the degree that the teams rely on the hiring of short-term post-doc researchers for key positions.

The participation of team-members in university education, especially on the graduate level, while crucial in the Czech situation, and their outreach activities stretch the human resources considerably. If such participation is not properly and formally acknowledged, the research outputs are bound to be regarded as weaker than they in reality are.

### **4. Recommendations**

The research foci chosen by the teams should be continued and further pursued.

All three teams are in need of a number of further key appointments (Iranian, Japanese, Korean studies, strengthening of the very small team of South Asian studies).

A kind of tenure track regulation should be introduced in order to gain especially valuable post-doc researchers as permanent team-members.

Travel funds for research and conference trips to the region of expertise need to be made available.

Permanent members who are going to retire in the five years ahead (South Asian studies, Ancient Near East) need to be replaced by new permanent members.

Teaching activities should be officially acknowledged and be regarded as core elements of professional performance. A scheme of temporary exchange of posts between team members and department members of the FFUK may be an instrument to intensify the contact between institute and university.

### **5. Detailed evaluations**

#### *Declaration on the quality of the results and share in their acquisition*

Research outputs have all been very good (class I and II of the scheme provided by the AVČR); the two journals run by the Oriental Institute (*Archiv Orientální* and *Nový Orient*) have specific functions and standards that they successfully meet. Research is at the centre of activities; its outcomes are leading to a growing visibility of the Oriental Institute in the international research community.

#### *Declaration on the involvement of students in research*

Students regularly use the facilities of the Institute and are in a student-teacher relationship with many members. Their PhD projects are often in connection with the research of members of the Institutes. There is, however, no funding at the Institute for grants paid to such students.

#### *Declaration on societal relevance*

Outreach activities are important, given that Islamophobia and ignorance about Asia are reportedly widespread in Czech society. They are pursued on many levels; the journal *Nový Orient* occupying a key position beside broadcast appearances and public lecturing. International members are bound to play a significant smaller role in outreach activities due to language skill restrictions.

#### *Declaration on the position in the international and national context*

The Institute is a crucial key element of Oriental studies in the Czech Republic that makes the country also internationally visible in this important area. *Archiv Orientální* is swiftly regaining its old position as a venue for international researchers. Team members' research published in English constitutes an acknowledged contribution to research in the relevant fields. The international standing is both proven and enhanced by the attraction of international post-docs to the Institute. Nationally, the importance of the Oriental Institute cannot be overestimated. The Institute now also pursues research activities linking up to broader, interdisciplinary projects pursued at the AVČR.

#### *Declaration on the vitality and sustainability*

The Institute consists mainly of young, highly motivated members. After a difficult phase of reconstruction, all teams have embarked on focussed, top-notch research. They are highly motivated and qualified. Some more permanent members would enhance the Institute's ability to conduct long-term research. Given the small size of research units, swift replacement of retiring members will be crucial.

#### *Declaration on the strategy and plans for the future*

All teams have presented concrete, clear and feasible research plans and foci. They are relevant, valuable and realistic but should be supported with travel funds and additional staff by the AVČR. The involvement of the Institute in Digital Humanities should be encouraged. Outreach and teaching activities are crucial in the situation of the Czech Republic and have to be formally recognised as work-load. As FFUK is also in a process of transformation, some of the teaching activities may become less demanding in five to ten years' time. The commission is praising the plans the research, which continues to be at the core of the Institute's activities since its reorganisation.

## **B. Evaluation of the individual teams**

### **Evaluation of the Team No. 1: Department of the Middle East**

#### **1. Introduction**

The department of Middle Eastern Studies has, just as the rest of the Oriental Institute, undergone a thorough reorganisation in the last few years. It is still in the process of re-formation and acquiring new researchers. The team is concentrating on Islamic studies and on the contemporary history of the Middle East, with one researcher engaged in research on the ancient Near East, a subject with a grand tradition in the Czech lands. Most of the researchers are relatively young but have established themselves as a vibrant research unit with an international staff.

#### **2. Strengths and Opportunities**

The team focuses on the Arab-speaking world and on Ottoman/Turkish studies and strikes a balance between cooperative projects mainly on contemporary issues and individual, basic research. That it analyses the Middle East of today with the methods of contemporary history complements the knowledge production at universities and think tanks in a valuable way. It has attracted a number of established scholars and young, promising post-docs who have put it into a working state.

Team members regularly teach at Czech universities, mainly at the FFUK. They co-advise students in the framework of a common programme with the FFUK and contribute greatly to the education of young scholars. The team has a thoroughly international outlook; nevertheless, it plays an active role in outreach, and many team members are present in the public domain (broadcast media, the journal *Nový Orient*).

#### **3. Weaknesses and Threats**

Comparable research units on the Middle East have also members working on the Iran – one field in which Prague has a remarkable tradition. Today, no team member has the relevant expertise.

Research activity and international visibility, however, are hampered by the lack of means for travel. In the Middle East, only Israel offers easily and fully compatible partners to an academy institute; contacts with other countries need to be financed with means of the AVČR. This applies both to participation in conferences and research trips to the important holdings in archives, libraries and field research (political parties, religious organisations). Members of the team are clearly disadvantaged in international comparison.

The relatively high turn-over of Postdocs poses a potential threat to long-term research activities.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The team needs to be supplemented with at least one member specialising on Iran. In this regard the search of the Institute for the employment of a new member should be supported.

It would be appropriate to develop mechanisms (joint degrees, highlighting AVČR advising) showing the impact of members of the AVČR. PhD and MA students regularly use facilities of the Oriental Institute. Temporary exchange of posts between

team members and department members of the FFUK may be an instrument to intensify the contact between Institute and University.

It would be advisable to install a kind of tenure-system that makes it possible to offer especially productive and successful post-docs a permanent position after the end of their contract as the turn-over is short and makes it difficult to engage in long-term-projects, one of the fields where academies make a difference.

The Strategy AV21 burdens this small team with the double task of concentrating on international first-class research on the one hand and engagement in teaching and outreach, on the other. Team members fulfil both requirements, but both activities are slowed down by the presence of the other.

Long-term projects in the framework of digital humanities are still in the process of being lined out; however, the collaborative project AVČR on the state and its legitimization has attracted team members' interest.

## **5. Detailed evaluations**

### *Declaration on the quality of the results and share in their acquisition*

Research: Publications for the academic audience so far are sound and either to be ranked in the category 1 or 2 of the AVČR's scheme of quality. Members of the team have developed a lively publication policy.

Teaching: Given the short time elapsed since 2013, it is only natural that no PhD has yet been completed under auspices of team members.

### *Declaration on the involvement of students in research*

Team members regularly teach at Czech universities, mainly at the FFUK. They co-advise students in the framework of a common programme with the FFUK. However, their contribution is rendered invisible by the fact that only universities award degrees. It would be appropriate to develop mechanisms (joint degrees, highlighting AVČR advising) showing the impact of members of the AVČR. PhD and MA students regularly use facilities of the Oriental Institute. Temporary exchange of posts between team members and department members of the FFUK may be an instrument to intensify the contact between institute and university. Teaching activity of team members is made an urgent matter by the transformation of the corresponding department at FFUK

### *Declaration on societal relevance*

Team members are active in outreach activities. These activities concern both popular publications of research results and the basics of knowledge on the Middle East – something of great urgency given the wide-spread Islamophobia in Czech society. Team members are using formats such as conferences, appearances in mass-media and popular writing in their outreach. The journal *Nový Orient* constitutes an important medium of these activities.

### *Declaration on the position in the international and national context*

The team has already firmly established itself nationally and is in the process of doing so internationally. It has attracted very good post-doc members from abroad; its composition is therefore international. Its research links up to the international academic discourse in the field.

### *Declaration on the vitality and sustainability*

The team is vital; its research interests are relevant, feasible and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. Members are generally young with the exception of the member specialising in ancient Middle East who will retire within the next period of evaluation. Sustainability can be enhanced by creating permanent positions that allow the pursuing of long-term projects.

### *Declaration on the strategy and plans for the future*

The team has established two *foci* of research that are of both academic and societal relevance, namely Islamic studies and the contemporary Middle East. They allow for individual research and collaborative studies. The team is in the process of taking its place in the international research environment as a leading institution.

The Strategy AV21 burdens this small team with the double task of concentrating on international first-class research on the one hand and engagement in teaching and outreach, on the other. Team members fulfil both requirements, but both activities are slowed down by the presence of the other.

Long-term projects in the framework of digital humanities are still in the process of being lined out; however, the collaborative project AVČR on the state and its legitimization has attracted team members' interest.

## **Evaluation of the Team No. 2: Department of East Asia**

### **1. Introduction**

All in all the East Asia team has convinced the Commission that it is composed out of a group of very strong and dynamic young researchers who are doing research on China on a very high and internationally competitive level. There is a lot of potential in the team which has been described by the Oriental Institute as being well positioned to function as a sort of role model to the other two departments due to its high international visibility.

### **2. Strengths and Opportunities**

The team has started to collaborate only recently and is still in its beginnings. Yet, one has already seen some remarkable successes. One good example is the strength in the acquisition of third-party funding. Various sources have been tapped on and the Department has made especially good use of funding from China and Taiwan. The newly established cooperation with the Academia Sinica in Taipei will certainly bring value not only to the Oriental Institute but also to East Asian Studies in the Czech Republic as a whole. Especially the library will profit a great deal from the relations of cooperation that have been newly established. As far as research is concerned, the portfolio of the team is broad and well-structured and there are several areas that allow cooperation with other units of the OI, Inner Asian Studies being just one example.

### **3. Weaknesses and Threats**

While the East Asia Department has a very strong China focus, it has not been able to hire specialists in Korean or Japanese studies. While job searches in these fields

are notoriously difficult on a world-wide level, there are financial constraints that make hiring suitable candidates more difficult than in other fields. The OI has to compete for talent with the best centers in this world. Given the fact that wages in Central Europe are lower than in other places one should think of other ways to make positions attractive.

#### **4. Recommendations**

To make hirings in competitive fields possible, it would be crucially important to give funding for such benefits as money for travelling to East Asia. The East Asia Department should continue to work on its performance and scholarly output. There is a lot of potential for this. In addition, it would be a good idea to make use of the cooperation with Taiwan and China to develop a strategy for getting access to internet resources. The Department has a good chance for becoming a hub in Central Europe as far as such resources relevant to research into East Asia are concerned.

#### **5. Detailed evaluations**

##### *Declaration on the quality of the results*

Given the recent efforts at restructuring the Institutes, the output of the Department has been very good. In addition to many Czech language publications, that are necessary for public outreach, there have been several English language publications that either came out with major publishers or appeared in high-quality journals. Phase I of the evaluation has all of the assessed publications in the range of 1 or 2. We would especially highlight the fact that in addition to *Archiv Orientální* also the Czech-language journal of the Institute contains high quality research. The team has conducted research on a wide range of research topics and has at the same time managed to maintain a coherent sense of overall purpose.

##### *Declaration on the involvement of students in research*

Most team members have invested a great deal of time into teaching at Charles University, but have supervised many theses yet. A joint doctoral programme that has been established with Charles University will surely enable the Department to bring in young PhD candidates who will contribute to the research projects that are currently underway. The evaluation Commission supports the Department in its aim to remain a recognized research institution while at the same time attracting PhD candidates who will collaborate in its projects.

##### *Declaration on societal relevance*

While an academy is and should remain the ideal place to conduct basic research, it is obvious that such subjects as the relationship between Han and non-Han people in China or the foundations of statecraft are of immediate interest to a general public and enable members of the Department to serve as advisors in politics. The members of the team have provided us with an impressive list of contributions on current issues in Czech mass media. At the same time the Commission wants to stress that members of the Department can contribute to public debates in current issues only on the basis of basic research into subjects the value of which is, as in any true scientific endeavor, not immediately visible to those without a training in the field.

##### *Declaration on the position in the international and national context*

Thanks to several new research relations on a European and also on a world-wide level the Department is highly visible in the national and international scholarly community. One example is the research group on Early Medieval China. Research on the Uyghurs requires



knowledge of both Chinese and Turkic languages and, because of the difficulty of the subject, can be found only very rarely on an international level. As far as its size and scope is concerned the Department has all chances to be on a par with major other centers in Europe. With several of its researchers coming from abroad it is highly international, a fact that proves the attractiveness of research in Prague. In order to hire internationally visible colleagues this attractiveness could be enhanced by offering additional benefits.

#### *Declaration on the vitality and sustainability*

The team is young and has good potential for further development. It has signed several memoranda of understanding with international partners, which will help it to grow into an even bigger structure. This success, on the other hand, requires a high degree of mobility. Collaboration with other major centers as well as with well-endowed partners such as the Academia Sinica in Taipei allow a natural growth of mobility. To make research collaborations such as the Early Medieval China network truly work, additional funding might be needed for travelling to workshops and conferences.

#### *Declaration on the strategy and plans for the future*

Two new research projects – on “China’s cultural diplomacy” and on “Strategies of Social and Political Order in China” – have been announced by the department. They will be complemented by the establishment of a branch office in Taipei that will facilitate the incoming mobility of researchers, be instrumental in creating an international research network, and finally enable the Department and the Institute to open up new research positions. These positions will be needed for the realization of the two projects. At the same time, they could also be used to integrate the Department with the other two units of the OI, for example by establishing a more explicit focus on Central or Inner Asian studies. The three initiatives will certainly be able to secure sustainable and organic development of the Department over the next five years.

### **Evaluation of the Team No. 3: Department of South Asia**

#### **1. Introduction**

With 5.76 FTE personnel, the Department of South Asia (DSA) is the smallest academic unit within one of the smallest institutes of the Czech Academy. It has only recently re-emerged from what was described by members and by the Director as a very critical transitional period. Despite its smallness, the team’s research interests are fairly broad, ranging from linguistic approaches to the development of Middle Indo-Aryan, over Tamil studies, to Central Asian politics and Buddhist epistemology, with the social history of oppressed, marginalized and religiously heterodox groups serving as an overarching topic for many institute members.

#### **2. Strengths and Opportunities**

The visibility and integration of some senior members in the international scholarly community and the positioning of their work with well-known publishing houses (Brill, OUP, Continuum etc.) are quite remarkable. At the same time, a wide range of publications of team members have successfully managed to address a broader audience within Czech society, focusing on topics related to contemporary Indian or Central Asian society and politics, Buddhist philosophy, ethics and religion as well as translations of Modern Indian literature. In view of the overall difficult funding situation for individual humanities projects within Czech academia, the members of the

Institute have undertaken a conscious effort to identify and align with cross-sectional research topics within the Oriental Institute, but also beyond it, as in the case of the “power and legitimacy” theme targeted by several historical teams of the Academy (the team there contributes to overcoming the narrow confines of “Standard Average European” political history), or in the case of cross-regional approaches to democracy research. Apart from regular GAČR applications, institute members have also tried to integrate within grant application schemes of the NEH (US), the CNRS (France) and on the broader European level (ERC). A further positive development is the opening up for international researchers working as post docs at the Institute and the continuation of close contacts with Ph.D. training at Charles University under the “History and Culture of the Lands of Asia and Africa” joint accreditation scheme.

### **3. Weaknesses and Threats**

Given the current age structure of the team, with one half of the members aged 55 years and older, future hiring policies will have to make conscious efforts to counter thematic fragmentation of research and to create topical nuclei around the interests of the younger age cohort (35-40), especially with a view to the broad expertise on Inner Asia available within other sections of the Oriental Institute. A rift between humanities and social science approaches to Indian topics would endanger the consolidation of the institute. Financial constraints will make competitive international job searches difficult, so the continuation of cooperation with Czech Universities and especially with the FFUK is crucial in order to educate the next generation of scholars especially at the PhD level. Third-party funding from Indian grant agencies and private sponsors will be hard to acquire; consequently the strategy of integration with European and international research networks should energetically be pursued further.

### **4. Recommendations**

To keep up with international academic competitors in Europe and beyond, travel funding to participate in conferences both in South Asia and elsewhere or to enhance staff exchange and training is indispensable. Maintenance of the precarious balance between scholarly output for the international community in peer reviewed journals and accessible outreach publications for Czech readers will be demanding; consequently, the first endeavour should be supported by funding for professional English proofreading and copyediting facilities. The team needs to be credited for participating in university-teaching. The team offers a wide range of expertise in the history of Indo-Aryan languages. It has demonstrated a clear potential to serve as a hub for digital humanities on a Central and Eastern European level. Successful projects such as the one in the lexicography of Indian languages require a mid to long term time frame; the department of South Asian Studies is the right unit for such projects.

### **5. Detailed evaluations**

#### *Declaration on the quality of the results*

The overall quality of research results published in English, mostly by senior members of the team, is quite excellent and the involvement in the flagship journal *Archiv Orientalní* considerable. These publications are ranked in category 2 of the Phase I evaluation scheme. Czech language publications on topics related to Buddhism, general and social history abound and

meet the needs of the broader Czech readership. The outreach journal *Nový Orient* serves to bridge the academic and non-academic sphere and offers high quality insights into ongoing research. While the output naturally reflects individual research interests of the institute members, almost all of them also cooperate successfully in publications both within the research unit, the institute and with various colleagues at Czech and other European universities.

#### *Declaration on the involvement of students in research*

Ph.D. students from FFUK and, in the case of Buddhist studies and politics, occasionally from universities elsewhere in the country, are occasionally integrated into research projects; several team members have a long history of participation in Ph.D. level training at FFUK. This involvement is time-consuming, but justified given the necessity to develop candidates for future hirings, unlikely to come exclusively from abroad.

#### *Declaration on societal relevance*

Given the rising political and economic importance not only of India but also of other South or South East Asian countries, such as Indonesia and the ASEAN states, on a global and regional scale, maintenance of linguistically and historically well informed academic competence at the CAS should seem to be an obvious interest of Czech politics and society. Members of the Institute have produced a wealth of publications in Czech for the general public and participated actively in all sorts of outreach activities in the media. While it is clear that such activities are important and welcome, the Commission wishes to stress that they should not eclipse the core business of the institute to conduct basic research.

#### *Declaration on the position in the international and national context*

It is clear that the team is almost unrivalled in most of its core research activities in a national context. Internationally, due to the efforts of senior researchers high visibility could be maintained across a challenging period. Thanks to the younger researchers, the reintegration into the European research community in several new thematic areas is well under way and reflected, for instance, by the attraction of a post doc fellow from Italy and the participation in international grant schemes.

#### *Declaration on the vitality and sustainability*

The challenge of developing the research foci of the three younger researchers at the Institute across the upcoming retirement of the three senior members is considerable, and it creates a necessity of lateral alignments with other research interests at the Oriental Institute and beyond. This has been clearly recognized by the team leader and members, as has the need to pursue activities leading to third party funding, bilateral cooperation with South Asian institutions via institutional MoUs, and the further integration into European and global research networks. The Commission therefore attests the team's present vitality and further sustainability.

#### *Declaration on the strategy and plans for the future*

The Commission looks forward to several individual publication projects, some of them prominently placed in such series as the "Murty Classical Library of India". Participation of some of the younger Institute members in the GAČR project "The Cultural Diplomacy of China: The Role of Non-state Actors and Regional Variations", in Horizon 2020 schemes on "China's Cultural Diplomacy" and in the ERC application on "Democratic Transitions in ASEAN" are initiatives which offer good prospects for a further cross-departmental integration of the research unit into thematic threads more widely shared at the Oriental Institute and beyond. The active participation in and development of the *Central and Eastern European Network of Indian Studies* will be of crucial importance to further regional

consolidation. The declared interest in the development of a hub function in Digital Humanities certainly seems to be a wise strategy given current European research and financing trends.

**Date:** December 2, 2015

**Commission Chair:** Prof. Alessandro Ferrara Ph.D.