

Characteristics of main research directions investigated at the institute and the achievements 2010–2014

Institute	Oriental Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.
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Foreword

The past five years, 2010–14, i.e. the period under the current evaluation, has been a rather **turbulent period** for the Oriental Institute (OI). As a result of the last evaluation in 2011, the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) was dissatisfied with the then leadership of the Institute, even to such an extent that there was a point when the closure of the whole Institute was considered as a viable option. In 2012 the Academy deemed it necessary to initiate wide-ranging measures, which lead to **substantial personnel changes** within the OI. In February 2013 the new leadership, with Dr. Beránek as newly appointed director, started the transformation process which has since aimed at converting the OI into a modern and well-functioning research institute, comparable to similar foreign institutions focusing on Asian studies. The transformation initiative is an **ongoing process** and its results will come gradually. Unfortunately, the inherited foundations with regard to project and grant activities or international cooperation were rather weak. Thus, the present evaluation comes at a time in our regeneration when the vast majority of the new initiatives have only just begun. In fact, many of the research staff, including the director, only started to work at the Institute in either 2013 or 2014 and two out of the three Heads of the Department were only appointed in late 2013.

About the Oriental Institute

The Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences is a **public non-university research institution**. Formally established in 1922, just six years after SOAS in London, the OI is one of the oldest institutions dedicated to the study of Oriental cultures in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1952, the OI was incorporated into the newly formed Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Since 1993, it has fallen administratively under the auspices of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The CAS is an umbrella research institution similar in function to its counterparts in continental Europe, such as the CNRS in France. Since its creation, the Academy of Sciences has always been a non-university institute with the primary mission to conduct basic research in a broad spectrum of the natural, technical and social sciences and the humanities. This research, whether highly specialized or interdisciplinary in nature, aims to advance developments in scientific knowledge at the international level, while also taking into account the specific needs of both Czech society and national culture.

In a country such as the Czech Republic, where university departments dealing with Oriental studies tend to be small and understaffed, the structure of non-university research bodies with permanent research positions brings numerous benefits. Among other things, scholars are enabled to pursue their specializations according to the needs of relevant fields of study, aiming correspondingly at the highest levels of research quality. The framework of the Institute allows for a flexible and open-ended approach to research initiatives in Asia-related topics, creating, in effect, an ideal environment for interdisciplinary research. The research quality is guaranteed by the Council of the Institute, composed of both internal and external members, and regular – both Czech and international – peer-review evaluations.

Tasks accomplished by the OI

The OI functions on four levels:

- primary research, both individual and collaborative;
- research cooperation with both Czech and international universities and research institutes;
- cooperation with the State institutions;
- outreach to a wider audience.

- Primary research

The OI concentrates on **both individual and collaborative research**. The research directions follow the general trends in western academia and – simultaneously – build upon the history of Oriental studies in the Czech Republic. The OI is divided into three departments on a geographical basis. This division makes it possible for specialists devoted to the study of a particular region to maintain close contact with their colleagues working on the same or similar problems within a given field. In addition, in order to provide opportunities for extending a specific methodological approach to the study of individual regions, working groups are frequently established independently of the geographical divisions. These teams are not only open to staff members from the different departments of the Institute, but also to scholars from other research bodies, both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

Currently, the three departments of the OI and its individual researchers focus on the following areas of research (for details see the reports for individual teams/departments in Appendix 3.5):

The Department of the Middle East

- The modern and contemporary history of the Middle East (the Arab states, Israel, Turkey, the Ottoman Empire);
- Islam in its many forms (including medieval, modern, political, mystical etc.); Islam in the Czech Republic;
- The social and cultural history of the pre-modern Middle East;
- Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) literature; the cultural history of the Ancient Near East.

The Department of South Asia

- The political and cultural history of India; history and ethnic relations in Sri Lanka;
- Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy; Hindu mythology;
- Indo-Aryan languages (Sanskrit and Hindi); the Tamil language and Tamil literature;
- The political and cultural history and ethnography of Central Asia (especially Afghanistan) and Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia and Malaysia).

The Department of East Asia

- The politics and history of modern China, Sino-Tibetan relations;
- The history of Medieval China; the history of religion in China;
- The ancient Chinese language, literature, and thought; the phonetics and phonology of Mandarin;
- The history, culture and postwar literature of Taiwan.

Currently, the Department of East Asia appears to be well positioned to function as a sort of role model to the other two departments. It is important to mention that its advanced status is due to several factors. First and foremost, we should acknowledge that since 1997 Prague has been the seat of the Taiwan based Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center (CCK). The existence of this center has provided an important boost to Czech Sinological studies. It has been an important source of external finance in support of student and researcher mobility, not only in relation to visits to China, but also across the world. Furthermore, the CCK has funded the publication of research data, conferences and other academic activities. Unfortunately, the other Asia related fields lag far behind in this regard. In addition to the CCK, Czech Sinologists have also engaged in fruitful cooperation with several Chinese universities. The international cooperation of Czech Sinologists has been also largely enhanced by a generous networking ESF-funded CHINET project of the Palacký University in Olomouc. Secondly, the popularity of Chinese studies, and the corresponding number of students entering this field has resulted in a steady influx of young researchers into the academic environment, thus leading to a plurality of research subjects to choose from.

Another boost for Chinese studies, both at the OI and in the Czech Republic in general, came in 2014, when the OI opened a **branch of the Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies (TRCCS)**. The branch forms the nascent basis for long-term cooperation between the Oriental Institute and the

National Central Library of Taiwan. The purpose of the TRCCS is to make Sinological literature more widely available through the gift of books and through the provision of access to electronic databases. By establishing the TRCCS, the OI has joined several prestigious sinological institutes around the world which already host this center, such as SOAS, the University in Leiden, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University in Leipzig. The establishment of the TRCCS is also the result of the long-term contacts between Czech sinologists and Taiwan.

In addition to individual projects, we have also been active in the field of **grant competition**, at both the national and the international level. As for the national level, there are, unfortunately, only a limited number of grant providers. In spite of this, we have regularly submitted proposals to the Czech Science Foundation (GACR, the largest Czech grant provider), The Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (oriented towards applied research, experimental development and innovation), and smaller grant providers (for more details, see the reports for individual teams/departments in Appendix 3.5). In the review period, we have been awarded these following grants:

- a three-year research project, “Death, Graves, and the Hereafter in Islam: Muslim Perception of the Last Things in the Middle Ages and Today” supported by the Czech Science Foundation;
- we were also the principal investigators of a project researched in cooperation with the Institute of International Relations entitled “The Comprehensive Strategy of the Czech Republic towards the MENA Region” (funded by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic).

In terms of **European grants**, which is, to a large degree, an untested area for us, 2014 saw us begin the preparation of several applications aimed at the ERC, Horizon 2020 and HERA and our researchers also submitted several applications to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. In addition, in the review period we were successful in securing several other international grant awards:

- Project title: “Courage in Early Chinese Texts (c. 4th–1st C. BCE),” provided by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation;
- Project title: “Discover Taiwan.” The project is sponsored by a grant “Taiwan Spotlight” (Ministry of Culture, R.O.C.).

The results of our research are published in various formats and via various channels. Besides specialized monographs, both in Czech and international languages, we publish in high standard academic journals. This is not the place to present the full list of outstanding results achieved during the review period (for these, see the lists of publications submitted for Stage I of these evaluations). However, it would be indicative of our success to mention just a few examples of the **individual research initiatives** that demonstrate the scope of the research and the publication venues:

- J. Strnad, *Morphology and Syntax of Old Hindī: Edition and Analysis of One Hundred Kabīr vānī Poems from Rājasthān*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013. Based on an early Rājasthānī manuscript, the volume includes an edition, with commentary, of one hundred poems attributed to the medieval mystic and thinker, Kabīr (ca. 1440–1518). This is followed by a detailed examination of the morphological structure and main syntactic features of the language. The work is accompanied by numerous textual examples and an index of all the lexical and grammatical morphs. The book can be used as a descriptive grammar of the dialect in question, an aid to the study of the historical development of New Indo-Aryan languages, and as a reader for use on university courses.

- J. Zouplna, “Beyond a one-man show: The prelude of Revisionist Zionism, 1922–1925,” *Israel Affairs*. 19.3 (2013): 410-432. Published in an impact factor journal, the article is based on hitherto unexploited material in several languages, including both interwar periodicals and archival documents. The paper traces a neglected period in the constitutional process of the development of the Israeli right and challenges the established viewpoint, which tends to ascribe the entire undertaking uniquely to the intellectual and organizational input of a single person, the iconic figure of Vladimir Jabotinsky.

- O. Weingarten, “The Sage as Teacher and Source of Knowledge: Editorial Strategies and Formulaic Utterances in Confucius Dialogues,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 68.4 (2014): 1175–1223. This article discusses structural features as well as the phraseology of selected Confucius dialogues. Contrary to common approaches, it studies the Confucius figure from the perspective of its textual

representations and elucidates the following aspects: 1) Confucius as a textual function that serves to integrate and validate disparate textual units within a coherent narrative framework; 2) Confucius as authoritative master who enunciates didactic pronouncements in the presence of his disciples

Among our other academic activities belongs publishing of **two journals** (*Archiv orientální* and *Nový Orient* – see Appendix 3.3, section 3). These journals are unique in many senses. Both have been continuously published for several decades and are in fact the only academic journals fully devoted to Oriental studies in the Czech Republic.

- Research cooperation with Czech and international universities and research institutes

Since 2013, we have attempted to significantly revive the international cooperation aspect of the OI's work. We have signed more than 10 Memoranda of Understanding with international partners (for the complete list, see our webpages) and prepared for the signing of several others (to be signed in early 2015 – e.g. with the East Asian Studies Department - the School of Culture, History and Language, the Australian National University; Zentrum für Ostasienwissenschaften – Heidelberg University; Central Asian Seminar, The Institute of Asian and African Studies – Humboldt University; Institute of Social Development & Western China Development Studies – Sichuan University, Chengdu, China; the Institute of History and Philology – Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan). We also regularly open up research positions for international scholars, mostly as postdoctoral positions (for details, see Section 2 below). At the end of 2013 we also initiated the **negotiations with the Academia Sinica** (Taiwan) to open our branch office there. These negotiations were finalized at the beginning of 2015 and the office is scheduled for opening in December 2015.

In the Czech Republic during the past two years, we have essentially sought to develop closer ties with our counterparts at Charles University (the Institute of Near Eastern and African Studies, the Institute of South and Central Asia, and the Institute of East Asian Studies). We have held several discussions with the heads of these Institutes, as well as with the current Dean of the Faculty of Arts, about the future of our joint PhD program and strategies for its enhancement. Together with these Institutes, we also regularly organize lectures by foreign scholars, larger workshops and conferences, and prepare grant proposals.

In addition, we strive to be active within the ERASMUS scheme, even though as a non-educational institute this is not an easy task. In spite of this, we attempt to attract international students (ideally at MA or PhD level) to join us (within the LLP-ERASMUS MOBILITY Program) for periods of up to 3 months. We were able to reach an agreement with a student from Poland in the summer of 2014, and two additional candidates are currently in negotiations with us.

Since 2013, we have organized several major **international activities** each year. In 2014, we hosted several large international conferences/workshops (for a fuller list and details, see the reports for individual teams/departments in Appendix 3.5):

- the Department of East Asia organized (together with the CHINET project of Palacký University, Olomouc) a specialized workshop, “Digital Sinology and Taiwan Studies” (October 23–24, 2014);
- the Department of the Middle East organized a two-day conference, “Protest Movements in the Contemporary Middle East,” which took place in Prague (May 29–30, 2014);
- we co-organized (with Masaryk University, Brno) an international conference entitled “Reading the Masters: Contexts, Structures, and Hermeneutic Strategies,” Masaryk University, Brno (September 5–6, 2014);
- together with Humboldt University in Berlin, we organized (in December 2014) a two day international workshop, “Dynamics of Change, Agents, Mechanisms and Economics of Transformation in Amdo, P. R. China.”

We have also actively participated in workshops and academic conferences across Europe and beyond (in the USA, UK, Germany, France, Australia, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, China, Taiwan, Turkey, and

many others). Some of the researchers have undertaken research trips to archives and libraries abroad within the bilateral cooperation of the CAS with its counterparts around the world (Turkey, Israel, China, Taiwan, UK, Italy, etc.). Researchers of the OI have been also involved in international academic bodies (European Association of Chinese Studies, Middle East Studies Association, European Association of Israel Studies, Centre for Ottoman Studies, London Middle East Institute, the European Association of Taiwan Studies, the Association of Asian Studies, among others).

- Cooperation with the State institutions

Some of our researchers regularly offer their knowledge and experience to the advisory boards (be they regular or of an ad-hoc nature) of various state bodies: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and its expert roundtables on various countries or issues related to Asia), the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Interior, and municipal courts among others.

- Outreach to a wider audience

We seek to disseminate and popularize our knowledge and research results among wider audiences, through a variety of means. For more details, see Appendix 3.3, section 2.

Research Report of the team in the period 2010–2014

Institute	Oriental Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.
Scientific team	Department of the Middle East

Overview

After a thorough reorganization of the whole Institute, the Department of the Middle East seeks to address the recommendations stemming from the last evaluations and incorporate suggestions made by the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS). These include: a gradual shift of focus from popularization in the Czech language towards international academic discourse, greater interaction with some of the contemporary issues faced by the Middle East region, and a more active grants/funding-related policy. It is worth recalling that the entire transformation was launched no earlier than in February 2013. As such, the Department has had barely two years to realize some of the aforementioned aims, a time period which cannot be seen as adequate for a complex assessment of the process. The current head of the Department (Dr. Zouplna) has actually served in the office since November 2013. The quantity and quality of the scholarly output, the number of academic contacts and activities, the visibility of the Department in the eyes of international academia and, last but not least, the number of English-language titles published by our fellows, have all risen steadily with time. Already the year 2015 seems to be quite promising in that regard.

According to their area and thematic expertise, the staff of the Department have included five specialists on the Arab world, two specialists on the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, one specialist on Israel and one specialist on the Ancient Near East. As such, the Department has been successful in responding to the need to fill the vacancy associated with Ottoman and Turkish studies, but has not yet managed to recruit a suitable candidate in the field of Iranian studies.

The expertise of the staff and the recruitment policy of the Department obviously reflect the diversity of the region. Clearly, the Middle East encompasses the Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hebrew cultures in addition to the legacy of the civilizations of the Ancient Near East. At the same time, it remains one of our core aspirations to convert this seemingly incongruent multitude into a mutually interrelated (or at least compatible) set of research topics, intelligible to other disciplines and appropriate in relation to the challenges facing Europe in the 21st century. Elaborating further on this refinement objective, the Department aims to concentrate on **two broad lines of research**, relating to: 1) Islamic studies, 2) the modern and contemporary history of the Middle East. The Department aims to combine the best traditions of Czech Oriental studies (the knowledge of relevant languages, familiarity with the environment) with a more dynamic attitude towards some contemporary issues. These include both the chronic challenges facing the region (the functioning of the state, the role of religion in society, the place of minorities, etc.) and the key phenomena of long-term significance (political and intellectual history, foreign relations etc.). In the field of Islamic studies, this includes subjects such as classical and modern Islam, political Islam, pre-modern society in the Muslim world etc. In its quest for greater up-to-date relevance the Department does not compromise in terms of its academic rigor, avoiding ephemeral topics which may be popular with the media but which fail to substantially enrich scholarly discourse.

Needless to say, the above lines of research are not mutually exclusive, as can be evidenced by the individual examples presented below. In addition to their expertise in the individual disciplines of Oriental studies, members of staff have also received appropriate methodological training in comparative religion, history and political science. Moreover, the overall model is designed to enable a flexible confluence of collaborative and individual projects. While the former are regarded as desirable

for the social sciences, it is assumed that the latter may continue to prevail in the humanities. During the time period under scrutiny, about half of the Department's members were involved in collaborative projects.

Members of Staff, their Research Profiles and Current Projects

By Dec 31, 2014, there were seven full-time researchers and two part-time researchers in the Department. Out of these, four (Melčák, Ostřanský, Prosecký, Zouplna) had been members of the Department throughout the time period under scrutiny and five (Beránek, Čuřík, Özel-Volfová, Steuer, Taglia) had joined later, i.e. in 2013 and 2014.

Dr. Beránek has served as director of the Institute since February 2013. His role, by its very nature, mainly concerns the management of the Institute. To his credit, Dr. Beránek has been involved in additional academic activities, leading two grant-project teams (see below), among other things.

Mr. Čuřík was part time collaborator on a project for the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (see below).

Dr. Melčák is a specialist on pre-modern society in the Muslim world. He has participated on a collaborative project, "The Medieval Urban Landscape in Northeastern Mesopotamia." Among his works, we should mention two articles published in *Archiv orientální* (2010, 2012) and a co-authored article published in *Iraq* (2013).

Dr. Ostřanský is an expert in the field of Islamic studies, specializing in popular religiosity. He has been part of a collaborative project on Millennialism in Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Among his output, an article in *Archiv orientální* (2012) and an edited volume on Millennialism (2012, in Czech) deserve to be mentioned.

Mrs. Özel-Volfová is a Ph.D. student specializing in, among other things, Turkish foreign policy. We should refer to her article published in *CEJISS* (2014).

Dr. Prosecký is a specialist in Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) literature and the cultural history of the Ancient Near East. Among his works published during the period under scrutiny we should highlight his book of translations of Mesopotamian (Sumero-Akkadian and Akkadian) mythological texts (2010, in Czech).

Dr. Steuer is a political scientist, specializing in contemporary Egypt and the Arab world. He has worked on a project on the party system in Egypt. Among his works, an edited volume on elections in post-2011 Egypt (in French, 2013) deserves to be mentioned.

Dr. Taglia joined the Department in the last quarter of 2014. A trained specialist in the modern history of the Middle East, his research focus deals with the late Ottoman Empire. His monograph, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, will be published by Routledge in May 2015.

Dr. Zouplna (Head of the Department) is a specialist in the field of modern Jewish history and Israeli history. His long-term project concerns the origins of the Israeli right. Among his output, we should mention an article published in *Israel Affairs* (2013). In addition, he also served as executive editor of *Archiv orientální* until the end of December 2011.

For the full list of publications produced by the members of the Department of the Middle East, please see the enclosed relevant documentation with the most important publications being enumerated and described in a separate list entitled.

In addition to the above, the Department has been instrumental in assembling a team to undertake a **research project**, "Death, Graves, and the Hereafter in Islam: Muslim Perceptions of the Last Things in the Middle Ages and Today" (funded by the **Czech Science Foundation** (GAČR), no. GACR 14-16520S, duration 2014–16). The relevant research team includes three members of our staff (Beránek, Melčák, Ostřanský), two colleagues from Charles University (Dr. Boušek, Dr. Ťupek) and one colleague from the University of South Bohemia (Dr. Klapetek). As with other religions, death, graves, grave visitation, and diverse ideas about the hereafter play a crucial role in Islam. In this regard, the practices of most Muslims clearly contradict the statements of normative Islam. Despite the centuries of effort on the part of Islamic jurists as they have sought to submit existing manners and customs to Islamic law, it is arguable that at no point in the history of Islam has the gap between normative and popular religiosity been so wide. Such a contradiction has been manifested throughout Islamic history and we still observe controversy around the topic of graves all over the Islamic world. Questions

relating to graves and their visitation repeatedly become the “battlefield” among followers of different Islamic streams, especially Salafis and Sufis. The Last Things in Islam can be examined from different points of view, among others as a legal problem, as a distinctive part of Muslim folklore or as a subject of Islamic writings. Thus, the main objective of the project is to provide for multidisciplinary research into the subject that might help to fill current gaps in this field of study. A collective monograph in Czech was published in 2014; a series of English peer-reviewed articles, an English monograph and other academic activities are currently being prepared. The relevance of this project is underlined by the fact that western scholarship has considerably neglected the religious, cultural, and social context of death, graves and the hereafter and, therefore, the contextualization and interpretation of these important phenomena will contribute to enhancing our academic knowledge of Islam.

In addition to this, two members of the Department (Beránek, Čuřík) were principal investigators of a **project** researched in cooperation with the Institute of International Relations (Dr. Ditrych and Dr. Čejka) entitled, “A Comprehensive Strategy of the Czech Republic towards the MENA Region”, (funded by the **Technology Agency of the Czech Republic** (TAČR), no. TB020MZV028, duration 2013–14). The goal of this project was to provide an analysis of several selected subjects (e.g. The Transformation of Islamic Movements in the Context of the Arab Uprisings, The South Mediterranean in the Context of the European Debt Crisis, Security Aspects of EU Politics) which the members of the team viewed as crucial for the development of the area in the period 2013–20. The outputs of the project (2 analytical studies, 2 round-tables) were directed for the use of concerned state agencies (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular) and the broader scholarly community.

International Academic Cooperation and Cooperation with Czech Universities

The OI has signed several memoranda on bilateral cooperation with institutions specializing in the field of Oriental studies (see our website for the full list). Upon the initiative of Dr. Zouplna and Dr. Steuer, a two-day conference, “The Protest Movements in the Contemporary Middle East”, took place in Prague (May 29–30, 2014). The conference, held simultaneously in English and French, was organized under the joint auspices of the OI and Centre français de recherche en sciences sociales (CEFRES) in Prague, with the kind support of Groupe de Recherches et d’Études sur la Méditerranée et le Moyen-Orient (GREMMO, Lyon) and Cercle des Chercheurs sur le Moyen-Orient (CCMO). It was attended by almost 30 speakers from more than ten countries. Most of the participants were senior scholars.

Members of the Department have been involved, on an individual basis, in **international academic bodies** such as, CCMO, Centre for Ottoman Studies, European Association for Jewish Studies, European Association of Israel Studies, Middle East Studies Association, London Middle East Institute etc. They have also actively participated in workshops and academic conferences across Europe and beyond (in Germany, Italy, France, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Poland, Portugal, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UK). In addition, they have undertaken numerous research trips to archives and libraries abroad (Egypt, Iraq, Israel, the Netherlands, Poland, Syria, Turkey, and the UK).

So far as **Czech universities** are concerned, members of our staff have taught at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague (Beránek, Ostřanský, Zouplna) and the Metropolitan University of Prague (Beránek, Özel-Volfová). The relevant set of lectures included one/two-semester courses on medieval and contemporary Islamic thought, the contemporary history of the Middle East and modern Jewish history. The Institute has a joint Ph.D. program with the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, with one member of the Department (Beránek) sitting on the Board supervising this program. The cooperation agreement with the Institute of Near Eastern and African Studies at Charles University is currently being extended. Among other things, we hope this may provide us with a greater pool of graduates in the future. At the moment, the Department hires scholars from abroad not only because it is a part of its strategy, but also due to a dire shortage of qualified personnel trained in this country.

Neither has the Department given up on popularization activities in the Czech language. Dr. Beránek and Dr. Ostřanský frequently appear in the Czech media, commenting on current events in the region. Dr. Ostřanský has also been instrumental in organizing a monthly series of public lectures (mainly) in Czech. Among the publication activities serving the needs of the educated Czech public, we should also make reference to a special issue on Turkey, which appeared in the fall of 2013 in *Nový Orient* (no. 68/3), a scholarly journal published by the Institute.

Research Report of the team in the period 2010–2014

Institute	Oriental Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.
Scientific team	Department of East Asia

Overview

Since the beginning of the transformation process, the Department of East Asia has tried to address the objections and recommendations raised during the last evaluation as well as the ideas of future development and research focus suggested by the Academy with the gradual shift of focus from producing scholarship in Czech towards international academic discourse, greater engagement with contemporary issues (especially with China on the rise as a new global power) and systematic grant-seeking policy being foremost among them.

Whereas in the past the main focus of the Department was almost exclusively on individual research, we are now aiming at **developing closer collaboration** within the Department, seeking to either integrate existing individual research projects into a wider framework of department research or to promote and support joint projects which would enable us to bring together the various areas of expertise of respective researchers, ideally not only within the Department but also across the whole Institute. We hope that these projects (two major ones started at the beginning of this year) will allow us to approach research topics from a variety of angles, thus broadening the outcomes of the research. Having said that, it does not mean, that we have given up on individual research altogether. We still consider it to be an essential part of our activities, enabling individual expertise to make a significant contribution to international academic discourse. We strongly believe that these two types of research project, individual and collaborative, should run side by side, enriching and expanding one another. We are also actively seeking potential cooperative partnerships with similar research institutions in other parts of the world so the highly specialized individual research can be integrated within the wider academic framework.

Even though it is still too early to assess the outcome of the transformation process, the past two years have witnessed **major improvements in fund raising** and the department has been successful in applying for grants, and securing additional funding for various activities including research initiatives, field trips, conferences and public lectures. More than two thirds of current department members are now participating in at least one grant-funded project and a number of applications submitted during 2014 are still pending. The quantity and quality of the scholarly output produced in the past two years, the number of academic contacts and activities and the visibility of the Department among international academia have all witnessed a significant improvement and we anticipate steady and positive developments in the near future, some research outcomes being due to appear during 2015.

The Current Structure of the Department

Despite its name, the current research team of the Department almost exclusively comprises specialists trained in Sinology and Chinese studies, with some minor overlaps with Inner and Central Asia. Their research interests, covering practically all aspects of Chinese studies, range widely and include: Chinese linguistics and phonology, Chinese and Taiwanese literature, ancient Chinese thought, medieval cultural, political and institutional history, and the history and politics of modern and contemporary China, with special regard to the governance and Han – non-Han dynamics in Xinjiang and Tibetan regions. This diversity of interest, seemingly incongruous, allows us to think broadly about the possible overarching themes that could be explored as part of a team project running parallel

with individual research initiatives. To date, three possible lines of enquiry have been identified, all of which combine the intrinsic values of meaningful original research that are likely to attract the interest of international colleagues working on similar topics, with the potential to appeal to a wider academic audience. All three have the capacity to respond to more general questions and to deal with the topical challenges of an increasingly interconnected world: 1) the history of Ancient and Medieval China, with a focus on political culture, legitimacy and the development of the concept of statecraft, 2) the modern and contemporary history of China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC); to be expanded eventually to include Korea and Japan (provided that we are able to attract the appropriate caliber of specialists in the fields of Korean and Japanese studies), and 3) the dynamics of Han/non-Han relations, along with the governance and development of the border regions of China within a broader historical perspective. Overall, we would like to continue the tradition of Czech Sinology expertise and produce sound scholarship based on meticulous philological research, combined with the relevant methodology of social sciences or other disciplines within the field of humanities studies.

The **absence of Japanese and Korean** studies specialists is one of the most pressing problems faced by the Department and we are trying to resolve this by regularly advertising post-doctoral positions and seeking to identify senior scholars who might be interested in joining our team. Yet, everything depends on the availability of suitable candidates and our efforts have not been successful so far. Nevertheless, we shall keep trying as the prospect of a regional expansion of the team offers interesting opportunities for the pursuit of common research topics. In the meantime, we have at least tried to step outside the geographical limits of the Chinese world and find common ground with our colleagues in the Department of South Asia, responsible for South East Asia and Central Asia studies (one project has just started and another has submitted applications to funding bodies).

Members of the Department, their Research Profiles and Current Projects

By December 31, 2014, the Department had seven full-time researchers. Of these, only three had been with the Department throughout the time period under scrutiny (Hrubý – first as a PhD student and then holding a regular research position from late 2012, Liščák, and Trísková) and four (Dluhošová, Klimeš, Ptáčková, Weingarten) had joined the staff later, i.e. in 2013 and 2014.

Dr. Dluhošová joined the Institute in 2013. Her fields of interest include the history and culture of Taiwan, modern Taiwanese and Chinese literature and the sociology of literature. Her research is focused on two main topics, language and ideology in the early post-war period of Taiwan and the means of control in the cultural field. In 2014 she also assumed responsibility for the international academic journal, *Archiv orientální*, published by the Institute, as its editor-in-chief. She is the main researcher for two projects, *Discover Taiwan* and *Ideology and Language: A Corpus of Early Post-War Taiwanese Writings* (for details, see below).

Dr. Hrubý (Head of the Department) specializes in the political, social and institutional history of Medieval China, non-Han dynasties and states in Chinese history and their interaction with the Han majority, with a focus on the elites of the disunion period and the process of political legitimization connected with questions of emperorship. He also specializes in the control and sharing of authority with the elites, and the concept of the ideal ruler in Medieval China. He has published an article in *Acta Universitatis Carolinae* (2011) on the model of an empress in medieval Chinese historiography and an article in *Nový Orient* (2014) on the practice of title bestowal on non-Han rulers. During his stint at the Institute he has also defended a PhD thesis on the system of titled nobility under the Jin Dynasty (2012). Since September 2012 he has been the editor-in-chief of the academic journal *Nový Orient*.

Dr. Klimeš was a PhD student affiliated to the OI until 2011; he rejoined the Department in 2013. He is a specialist in the field of the history and politics of modern and contemporary China and Xinjiang. He has extensively researched the Uyghur national movement before 1949 (an article in the *Central Asian Survey* (2014), with a new monograph on this topic being published by Brill at the beginning of 2015) and the PRC's policies towards Uyghurs and Xinjiang. Currently, his interests are in the process of shifting to the political system of the PRC, ethnic policies of the Chinese government in general and the political uses of language and ideology in contemporary China.

Dr. Liščák's scholarly interests lie within the field of Chinese history, especially in relation to cultural contacts and religious interaction along the Silk Road. He has focused on the incursions of Buddhism and Christianity into China and the history of Franciscan missions in China between the 13th and the 18th centuries. His life-long commitment is to Friar Odoric of Pordenone, his journey across Eurasia and the written testimony of his travels. In addition to publishing several chapters in a collective volume and articles on Odoric (for example in the Slovak Academy of Sciences 2011, *Anthropologia Integra* 2012), he has devoted a whole monograph to this Franciscan missionary, which appeared in 2014. He has also authored a comprehensive encyclopedia of Confucianism, aimed at the general public (Academia 2013).

Dr. Ptáčková has only recently joined the institute (summer, 2014). She has been trained in both Chinese and Tibetan studies and as such she is a welcome reinforcement of the Department, widening its research profile and opening up the possibility of overlapping with other departments of the Institute. Her research topics include the implementation of the Chinese development policy in Tibet, environmental and lifestyle changes of pastoral communities in Tibetan areas, government policies towards these communities (urbanization, sedentarization and grassland protection), as well as the more general topic of the history of Sino-Tibetan relations.

Dr. Trísková specializes in the phonetics and phonology of Modern Standard Chinese (Mandarin). She has always conducted her research on Chinese phonetics in close connection with the practical value of its outcome, i.e. its value in relation to the process of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. In addition to the methodology of teaching Mandarin pronunciation, her current research topics include the opposition of stress and de-stress of Mandarin monosyllabic functional words. She has published a monograph on the segmental structure of the Mandarin syllable (Karolinum 2012) and an article in *Archiv orientální* (2011) on the teaching of Mandarin syllables.

Dr. Weingarten's research is mainly in the field of early Chinese intellectual history, classical Chinese language and philology and the textual history of early Chinese writings, with a special focus on the justifications of social and ethical norms, representations and the justifications of violence in ancient China. He has published an article on the philology of *The Analects of Confucius* (*Early China* 2014) and another on editorial strategies of Confucian dialogues (*Asiatische Studien* 2014). In 2014 he received a three year grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, no. RG-003-EU-13 (*Courage in Early Chinese Texts (c. 4th–1st c. BCE)*), to research representations of courage and cowardice, self-harm, self-sacrifice and suicide in early Chinese texts.

Collaborative Projects and Additional Activities

Apart from Dr. Weingarten's individual project, **two additional funded projects** have run during the evaluated period and two more have started this year (see the future research plans section). The first is a bilateral project between the Czech Academy of Sciences and the National Science Foundation (Taiwan, ROC), entitled *Ideology and Language: A Corpus of Early Post-War Taiwanese Writing* scheduled for 2014–2015 (the responsible researcher being Dr. Dluhošová, together with Dr. Alvin Chen from the National Changhua University of Education, ROC).

The second grant was awarded within the Taiwan Spotlight scheme by the Taiwanese Ministry of Culture and covered a project entitled *Discover Taiwan* (the recipient being Dr. Dluhošová). Over a two year time span (2014–2015) the project aims at a more focused promotion of Taiwanese culture, both in realms of academia and among the general public, by organizing a series of activities, through which the OI, in cooperation with other Czech universities in Brno (Masaryk University) and Olomouc (Palacký University), and with the European Association of Taiwan Studies, will address diverse topics in different areas of research and culture in order to reach different target audiences. In addition, cultural events targeted at the general public, such as a book exhibition, a discussion with Taiwanese writers, and film screenings, are scheduled for this year. The East Asia Department has already organized (together with the CHINET project of the Palacký University in Olomouc) a specialised workshop, *Digital Sinology and Taiwan Studies* (October 2014), focusing on a new, cutting-edge, methodology of Digital Humanities, which has officially been announced as a priority for future research activities at many institutes of the CAS. The workshop presentations have identified various possibilities for the application of this methodology in the study of Chinese and Taiwanese culture.

Dr. Weingarten has also co-organized an international conference, *Reading the "Masters": Contexts, Textual Structures, and Hermeneutic Strategies*, which was held in September 2014 at Masaryk University in Brno (the main organizer was the CHINET project of the Palacký University in Olomouc).

Dr. Hrubý initiated an **Early Medieval China Workshop** (organized together with CHINET at Palacký University in Olomouc at the beginning of December 2015). This workshop assembled a small group of early-career researchers with a common interest in early mediaeval China. The objective was to establish a research group with the aim of stimulating research into this still understudied period of Chinese history in order to lay the foundations for a specialized "field", with connected communities pursuing the same research interests. Unlike the United States, Europe still lacks such a field and at present, it seems that there are only a number of isolated researchers with an interest in early mediaeval China. We hope that the possibilities for future cooperation and the development of relevant research topics shared by early medieval China scholars Europe-wide that were discussed during the workshop, will eventually lead to the establishment of a regular research group working on related topics, regardless of the affiliation of its members. These developments are part of the already mentioned larger effort to identify partners for prospective common projects and to sustain highly specialized individual research on "minor" topics which appear less justifiable under the conditions nowadays prevalent in academia.

Last, but not least, in December 2014 the OI (Dr. Ptáčková) together with Humboldt University in Berlin organized a two day international workshop, *Dynamics of Change, Agents, Mechanisms and the Economics of Transformation in Amdo, P. R. China*, which focused on multidisciplinary research relating to the ongoing transformation processes influencing the local Tibetan population of Amdo, a Tibetan area currently administered by the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu. Thanks to its geographic location, Amdo provides a unique opportunity for studying the complex and multilayered processes of clashing and merging experienced by different ethnic and social groups, religions, languages and modes of livelihood and also by different political structures. It was part of a larger long-term initiative by an international group of academicians from the Amdo Research Network (Dr. Ptáčková is one of the founding members). It is hoped that, as in the case of medieval Chinese history, this kind of networking activity will help to integrate the high level individual research initiatives pursued in the Institute into a wider academic discourse.

International Academic Cooperation and Cooperation with Czech Universities

Over the past two years the OI has managed to sign several memoranda on bilateral cooperation agreements with institutions specializing in Oriental studies (see our website for the full list) and several new ones are in the process of being signed (connected to the projects starting in 2015, see below for more information).

Members of the Department were, and are, still involved, on an individual basis, in **international academic bodies** such as the European Association of Chinese Studies, the European Association of Taiwan Studies, the Association of Asian Studies, the Amdo Research Network, the Early Medieval China Group, the International Confucian Association etc. They have also actively participated in workshops and academic conferences across Europe and beyond (in Australia, Belgium, China, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Taiwan, the UK and the USA). Some of the researchers have also undertaken several research trips to archives and libraries abroad (mainly in China and Taiwan, but also in Italy and the UK).

Despite its status as a purely research institution, **cooperation with Czech universities** is perceived as a high priority by both the leadership of the OI and the CAS. It is hoped that the quality of primary research and the unique expertise of our researchers has the capacity to complement the suite of M.A. and Ph.D. programs run by the universities, thus contributing to the raising of standards in education. As university departments often mainly focus on Chinese philology, we are able to provide additional research interests, thus broadening the horizons and research possibilities for students at the higher

levels. At the same time, there is an opportunity to survey the pool of university graduates and select possible future research fellows. So far, the OI has established a joint doctoral program with the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, in Prague, and is currently negotiating with the Palacký University in Olomouc. In addition to supervising doctoral and M.A. dissertations and sitting on the examination committees, members of the Department have been engaged in teaching at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague (Hrubý, Klimeš, Liščák) and the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno (Dluhošová, Hrubý, Třísková). The lecture series included one or two semester courses on the history of China, medieval China, ethnic policies of the PRC and contemporary China, Taiwanese and Chinese literature and the phonetics of Mandarin Chinese. In 2012 Dr. Hrubý received a special grant from the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Charles University in Prague (CSM 119), aimed at broadening cooperation between the Faculty and the Academy of Sciences in order to prepare a two semester lecture series on non-Han dynasties in the history of China, which was realized in the academic year 2012–2013.

Another activity pursued in close cooperation with universities has been a series of occasional lectures delivered by visiting scholars, either at the Academy headquarters or at the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation International Sinological Centre at Charles University. Thanks to a fruitful cooperation relationship with the CCK, and also with the ESF-funded CHINET project of the Palacký University in Olomouc, it has been possible to organize 12 lectures (5 in 2013 and 7 in 2014) with 5 more scheduled for the first half of 2015. The lecturers were leading scholars in various fields of Chinese and Taiwanese studies from Australia, China, Taiwan, the UK and the USA.

The Department is also active in the popularization of research and the provision of a relevant information service to the Czech media and public. Some members of the department appear frequently in television or radio debates (Dr. Klimeš, Dr. Dluhošová) and the majority of the team members have also participated in a series of public lectures organized by the OI and targeted at university students and the general public.

It should also be mentioned that in 2014, thanks to the efforts of the Department and above all to Dr. Klimeš, the Institute managed to establish the **Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies**, sponsored by the National Central Library of the R.O.C., Taiwan. These centers, located at major universities and research institutes abroad, aim to promote international exchanges in Chinese studies and Taiwan's achievements in Sinology, thus building a global Sinological resource and information platform which has the capacity to broaden and deepen cultural exchanges between the Chinese and Western worlds. The Institute annually receives books, audio-visual materials and e-resources published in Taiwan. The NCL has also established an IP channel for partner organizations in order to search the digital resources of the library and CCS within copyright limits. In addition, the library provides a collection of links to other Sinological resources in Taiwan in order to further serve scholars and experts and expand their research opportunities.

Research Report of the team in the period 2010–2014

Institute	Oriental Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.
Scientific team	Department of the South Asia

During the period under review the Department of South Asia of the OI has consistently sought to implement the recommendations stemming from the previous review, as well as the subsequent suggestions made by the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS).

Historical Background

South Asian studies formed an integral part of the research program of the OI from the very beginning of its existence (est. 1922, active from 1927). The fact that the Institute was founded with the double aim of “fostering and cultivating scholarly and economic contacts with the Orient” and that it was never institutionally affiliated to Charles University made it possible for its fellows to pursue research programs that were not directly related to a university curricula formed in the pre-WWI period. In the field of South Asian studies this meant that the orientation towards classical Indological themes, then prevalent at the University, could have been supplemented with research on contemporary topics, and later also on the teaching of modern Indian languages (Bengali, Hindi). Despite all the administrative and ideological upheavals that have affected the Department during its long history, this focus and its value have never been thrown into doubt.

However, it is important to stress that the development and the very existence of classical Indology, as well as South Asian studies in the broader sense of the word, in the OI has always been closely connected with the cultivation of these fields of study at Charles University, Prague. To the present day, the Institute of South and Central Asia of its Faculty of Arts is the only university establishment in the Czech Republic that includes Indian studies as part of its curriculum offer, and, for us, has remained as practically the sole recruiting ground for young and promising scholars interested in pursuing an academic career in Indian studies.

The Current Structure of the Department

In 2012, i.e. in the middle of the evaluated period, two senior members of the Department (Jan Bečka and Dagmar Marková) retired, with the then director, Stanislava Vavroušková, also an Indologist, quitting the Institute at around the same time. By the end of 2012 the staff of the Department had shrunk to just four members: **Jan Filipský** (part-time: history of India, the Tamil language), **Jiří Holba** (Buddhist studies), **Pavel Hons** (modern Indian society, Dalits, the Tamil language) and **Jaroslav Strnad** (the history of medieval and modern India, Hindi, Sanskrit). Towards the end of the evaluated period the team was strengthened by the addition of two younger scholars. **Tomáš Petrů** (Indonesian studies) has the capacity to broaden the range of the research interests of the Department and to spearhead a re-focusing on the Southeast Asia region – a clear desideratum after the demise of Jan Bečka, who, until 2012, had been the sole scholar devoted to the history and politics of this relatively neglected area. **Věra Veselá** (Afghanistan and Central Asia) is expected to contribute in the fields of topics of contemporary relevance that connect the South Asian region with its north-western and northern neighbors. The new policy of opening the Institute to young scholars from abroad by granting temporary scholarships to postdoctoral individuals resulted in the young Italian fellow, **Mauro Valdinocci**, joining the Department (1 year stay, 2013–2014).

Members of Staff, their Research Profiles and Current Projects

Members of the Department follow their individual research programs but generally find common ground by working on topics that are thematically related. In the broad field of South Asian studies the research interests of Holba, Hons and Strnad have tended to focus on movements and phenomena, historical as well as contemporary, that profile themselves as either marginal and oppressed, or stand in opposition to the orthodox, mainstream and dominant segments of Indian society: heterodox teachings of Buddhism and the *nirguna bhakti* in the Antiquity and Middle Ages, Dalit movements and ideology in contemporary India, and problems of emancipation in relation to Indian women. All three abovementioned members of the Department have published significant papers in their respective fields of study, as can be seen from the list of main research outputs.

J. Holba brought to a conclusion and to publication his long-term project aimed at providing a Czech translation of the key Buddhist text, the *Diamond Sūtra*, with commentary. The work is accompanied by an extensive introductory study dealing with the concept of Bodhisattvas and an historical survey of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and its teachings. The text of the translation of the *Sūtra* is mirrored by the Sanskrit original and is supplemented by commentaries and interpretation notes. In view of the growing interest in Buddhism in the scholarly community, as well as among the general educated public, coupled with the importance and prestige of the *Diamond Sūtra* in many Asian countries, its translation was long felt to be a desirable outcome. Another result of the author's activity in the field of Buddhist studies is his 70 page introductory study, *Nāgārdžuna a madhjamaka* [*Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka*], in the edited volume of research articles, *Nāgārdžuna. Filosofie střední cesty* [*Nāgārjuna. The Philosophy of the Middle Way*]. The essay summarizes the main tenets of Nāgārjuna's philosophy and its importance for the subsequent development of Buddhist philosophical thinking in India and beyond.

P. Hons, in collaboration with **D. Marková** (until 2012 a regular member of the Department) published a book of translations of selected representative poems, short stories and parts of novels by modern Hindī and Tamil Dalit authors *Když němí promluví... Antologie hindské a tamilské dalitské literatury* [*When the Dumb Speak... Anthology of Hindī and Tamil Dalit Literature*]. The introductory essay acquaints the Czech reader with the problems of oppression and exclusion encountered by Dalit communities in different parts of India, and also introduces the reader to their struggle for emancipation. The book addresses a serious gap in relation to the information coverage of contemporary India, at least as far as the interested Czech reading public is concerned.

Indian women represent another marginalized segment of the Indian population that has raised its voice in the struggle for emancipation. The book by **D. Marková**, *Zrcadlo Indie 20. století v díle hindských spisovatelek* [*Mirror of 20th century India in the Work of Hindi Women Writers*], maps the most important and burning problems of contemporary India – castes, Dalits, poverty, Hindu-Muslim relations, aspects of the everyday life of different classes of Indian people, from the perspective of Indian women as reflected in novels and short stories of modern Hindi female writers. Both the book on the Dalits and the anthology prepared by Marková share the advantage of confronting the reader with authentic voices and numerous facets and aspects of everyday life in India in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the dynamics inherent in the unfolding emancipatory struggles.

J. Strnad (Head of the Department) devotes his attention to the intellectual and literary heritage of medieval movements of heterodox and lower caste Indian thinkers (*sants*) who used their poems and couplets to challenge the reigning Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy and figured as founders of sects (*panths*) that have continued to be active until the present day. One of the obstacles standing in the way of scholarly study on the origins of these movements is the non-standard language of the early texts, which are composed in an irregular mix of mutually related but distinct dialects of the central and western part of the broad Hindī speaking area. To map the language forms in their actual contexts Strnad chooses a strictly morphological approach and has performed a thorough morphological analysis and description of selected texts. The resulting book, *Morphology and Syntax of Old Hindī: Edition and Analysis of One Hundred Kabīr vānī Poems from Rājasthān*, includes an edition with commentary

containing one hundred poems attributed to the medieval mystic and thinker, Kabīr, followed by a detailed treatment of the morphological structure and main syntactic features of the language. The exposition is accompanied by numerous textual examples and an index of all lexical and grammatical morphs. The book can be used as a descriptive grammar of the dialect in question, an aid to the study of the historical developments of New Indo-Aryan languages, and a reader for use in university courses.

J. Filipský concentrates his research on the problems of ethnicity, national identity, religious revivalism, confessional politics and secularism in Sri Lanka. As a member of a multidisciplinary team coordinated by Masaryk University in Brno, he has co-authored and co-edited numerous encyclopedic entries presenting an overview of South Asian social and cultural history, religious movements, ethnic groups and nations (the online Encyclopedia of Anthropology), problems of sexuality, eroticism, love and marriage in the Indian cultural sphere (the online encyclopedia that treats the subject within anthropological, historical and cultural contexts) and the past and present of land transport, the automotive industry and the intricate relationship between man and the car, with a particular focus on Asia (an online database plus a book publication, *Auto-Erotika aneb Kámasútra automobilového věku [Erotics on Wheels or the Kamasutra of the Automotive Age]*).

Postdoctoral fellow **M. Valdinocci** concentrated his research interests on another Indian heterodoxy, the Sufi traditions of Indian Islām. Referring to the example of the Qādirī Sūfīs of Hyderabad (India) he analyses in his article “*Zikr e samā’ tra i sufi qādirī di Hyderabad*”, the performative aspects of the Qādirī teachings and their transmission to subsequent generations of adepts in the process of spiritual training. The study is based on the author’s previous fieldwork research in India.

Apart from the main research outputs presented above, members of the Department have produced articles and conference papers relating to their main research interests. The most important ones were enumerated and described in a separate list submitted during this evaluation process.

One aspect of the scholarly output presented above and in the accompanying list that deserves a comment is the language of its presentation. The fact that some books and studies published by members of the Department are in the Czech language and other in English is to be understood in the context of the dual responsibilities that Czech scholars have (and have always felt to have) towards the international scholarly community on the one hand and an interested domestic public on the other. The selection of topics and their presentation naturally differs in conformity with their main aim – to contribute to the growing scholarly knowledge of South Asia and to fill the gaps in the basic information resources the educated Czech public needs and requires in order to cultivate their knowledge of the countries concerned.

Members of the Department realize the need to integrate their main research interests and activities into international context and find suitable partners – formally organized in specialized departments at universities or otherwise – to submit their research results for discussion and to plan joint projects.

J. Strnad has participated in an informal association of South Asia scholars who specialize in medieval North Indian literatures and languages (mainly various dialects of Old Hindī), study and prepare critical editions of hitherto little explored texts that can throw new light on aspects of medieval Indian history, literature and religious movements. Strnad participated at two *Early Hindī/Braj bhāshā workshops* in Miercurea Ciuc, Romania (2011) and Banskó, Bulgaria (2014) and tested with international scholars his method of grammatical and semantic analysis of difficult texts and problematic readings. Intensive ten-days reading sessions where different dialects, themes and genres are subjected to close scrutiny of experts from western and Indian universities significantly broaden the interpretative horizons of all participants. The next workshop, organized by Strnad, is planned to take place in the Czech Republic in 2016. The same broad community of scholars organizes more formal triennial conferences, the *International Conferences on Early Modern Literatures in North India (ICEMLNI)*. Its 12th meeting in August 2012 in Simla, India gave Strnad the opportunity to present his ideas on the fluid character of oral traditions that are generally understood as the main carriers of

important spiritual movements. Contacts with the international scholarly community have resulted in application for a three-year grant to the National Endowment of Humanities (USA) in which Strnad, in collaboration with scholars from the USA and India, has undertaken to prepare a critical edition, based on an old manuscript, of a corpus of poems attributed to medieval mystic Kabīr.

Another originally rather informal international group of scholars that was given a more formal shape is the *Central and Eastern European Network of Indian Studies (CEENIS)*. With the financial help of the Government of India it organized since its establishment in 2006 several conferences, one of them in Prague in 2010. P. Hons, D. Marková and J. Strnad have participated in the activities of this association and have contributed by conference papers and articles (Hons also in the *CEENIS Current Research Series*). As the Government of India has an important say in the personal as well as financial aspect of the network, its future activities will to great extent depend on the policy of the new Indian government – a matter that is so far not quite clear. However, the network has already helped to establish contacts that can be developed independently of the Indian support and participation. In 2013 Hons utilized the existing contacts with the Mykolo Romeris University in Vilnius, Lithuania, and, apart from presenting a paper at the conference held there, facilitated a bilateral agreement between the OI and the Centre of Oriental Studies at the Vilnius University. Besides, Hons and Marková have been among regular participants in the international *Project Pandanus* organized by the Institute of South and Central Asia at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, Prague. Both participate in its international seminars and publish in the journal *Pandanus*.

For more than two decades, **J. Holba** has been in close contact with the international community of scholars researching various aspects of Buddhism in historical as well as contemporary perspectives. He was able to bring together a group of specialists of international renown (Jay L. Garfield, Shiro Matsumoto, C. Oetke, D. Seyfort Rugg, Mark Siderits, Tom Tillemans, Paul Williams) to contribute chapters to the anthology planned by him. The result, *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Prague, Oikoumene 2012), contains some of the most important studies on Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (2nd c. CE) published to date; the undertaking has received generous financial support from The Elisabeth de Boer Fund of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. The idea of it was to present for the first time to Czech readers the profound and enigmatic philosophy of this great thinker of the Buddhist Madhyamaka school. Holba is the author of an extensive introductory study to the anthology. In the years 2012-2014 Holba was also able to utilize his contacts with the international scholarly community to organize in Prague a series of lectures of eminent specialists covering various aspects of Buddhist studies: Prof. Tom Tillemans (University of Lausanne, January 2013), Associated Prof. Mario Poceski (Dept. of Religion, University of Florida, USA, October 2013), Dr. David Higgins (University of Vienna, March 2014) and Associate Prof. Miloš Hubina (Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, April 2013 and 2014).

T. Petrů is well on the way to reinvigorate the Southeast Asia studies that were in the recent years seriously understaffed both at the OI and the Charles University. His recent initiatives are clearly directed into the international arena – in the single year 2014 he participated in three international conferences (University of Oxford, University of Brighton, University of Copenhagen), each time with a paper devoted to aspects of Islam in Southeast Asia. **V. Veselá**, a new member of the Department, is active in developing international contacts in the field of Central and Inner Asia studies – a new area of research without a strong domestic tradition to rely on either at the OI or the Charles University.