

EWA ZAJDLER

Professor Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler (1933–2007)

After a long struggle with illness Professor Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler, 金斯德, passed away peacefully at home on 27 December, 2007.

He was a dedicated and brilliant academic teacher and my “dear mentor”, as well as an outstanding sinologist with wide-ranging research interests in Chinese culture, history and languages. In his research, numerous writings and in his teaching he demonstrated a profound understanding of the relations between Chinese languages, dialects and the processes involved in these across centuries. No longer will I enjoy the engaging conversations with the Professor, who opened new scopes of linguistic research and who drew my attention to them.

Professor Mieczysław J. Künstler, was born in Słupca, a town in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska, a district of Poland) on March 26, 1933. Professor Künstler graduated from the secondary school – Państwowe Gimnazjum i Liceum im. Stefana Żeromskiego in Jelenia Góra, Poland in 1951 and then he studied sinology at University of Warsaw under the supervision of Professor Witod Jabłoński. He obtained a Master’s Degree in linguistics in 1956, subsequently followed by a PhD title in 1962; his doctoral thesis was entitled „Les formations adverbiales a quasi-suffixe en Chinois archaïque et dans la langue de l’époque des Han”. The thesis was written under the supervision of Professor Janusz Chmielewski and reviewed by Professor Paul Demieville (Collège de France, Paris), Professor Alexis Rygaloff (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris) and Dr Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (University of Warsaw). Prof. Künstler’s post-doctoral thesis (Habilitation) entitled „Ma Jong – vie et oeuvre” was published in 1969, having been reviewed by Professor Paul Demieville, Professor Lionello Lanciotti (University of Rome) and Professor Janusz Chmielewski (University of Warsaw). Professor Mieczysław J. Künstler went on internships to China (1956–58 and 1984–85, Beijing) and to France (1960 and 1966–67, Paris), where the French sinologists and linguists (Demieville, Gernet, Rygaloff, Martinet and others) exerted a profound influence on Prof. Künstler’s approach to linguistics and on his research directions.

Professor Künstler joined the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Warsaw in January 1956 first as an assistant teacher, in 1962 he became an assistant

professor, since 1978 he worked as a university professor (profesor extraordinarius) and finally in 1986 he was tenured as a full professor (profesor ordinarius). In the last decades of the 20th c. he was the Head of the Department.

Professor Mieczysław Jerzy Künstler published in German, English, Russian and Chinese, both in Poland and abroad. He wrote over two hundred papers and works, including about 30 books, many translations, not only about Chinese but also about other related issues.

His linguistic work deserves special attention, as his publications constitute a crucial contribution to Chinese studies in Poland. Künstler's book *Języki chińskie* (2000) [*Chinese Languages*] was the first diachronic presentation of the Chinese languages written in Polish. It showed the processes of change in Chinese and their final results present in modern languages. He introduced Chinese art and culture to Polish readers in the following volumes: *Pierwsze wieki cesarstwa chińskiego* (1972) [*First Centuries of the Chinese Empire*], *Mitologia chińska* [*Chinese Mythology*] (2001), *Sprawa Konfucjusza* [*Confucius's Case*] (1983), *Sztuka Chin* [*The Art of China*] (1992) and in *Dzieje kultury chińskiej* [*The History of Chinese Culture*] (1994) which was updated and re-published just before his death.

As a pioneer and a key figure in the field of Chinese Studies in Poland he constantly challenged his students during seminars and stimulated them to investigate new questions in Chinese linguistics and history. It was thanks to Professor Künstler that the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Warsaw gained outstanding reputation and wide acclaim in the late 20th c.

Professor Künstler was a member of many Polish and international scholarly societies, e.g. Polskie Towarzystwo Orientalistyczne (since 1955) [Polish Oriental Society], Polskie Towarzystwo Językoznawcze (since 1958) [Polish Linguistics Society], Société de Linguistique de Paris (since 1960), European Association of Chinese Studies and International Society for Chinese Language Teaching as well as Towarzystwo Naukowe Warszawskie [Warsaw Scientific Society]. On various occasions he was invited to give speeches at conferences and meetings around the world (e.g. in Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Graz, Innsbruck, Vienna, Mainz, Kassel, Bonn, Paris, Barcelona, Zurich, Bern, Thessaloniki).

I consider myself one of Professor Künstler's students. He encouraged me to develop my linguistic passion from my second year on. Later, I had the honour to work with him in the Department of Chinese Studies and to conduct my research with his support. He was my supervisor not only when I was a graduate student and later when I was writing my doctoral thesis, but also during my present post-doctoral studies. Similarly to his other students, I feel indebted to him for his cooperation and indispensable help in many scholarly activities. In the past few years he was more of a co-worker than a supervisor to me but he showed true respect for my own linguistic interests and projects. He was always a very hard working person and as such he remained a shining example of diligence even despite his recent health problems. His death is an unrecoverable loss to me as his student and collaborator and even more so to the world of Chinese studies in Poland and abroad.