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International Slavic Studies: Concepts, History and Evolution

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Abstract: This paper departs from the definition of Slavistics and reviews the history of international Slavic studies, from its prehistory to its formal establishment as an independent discipline in the mid-18th century, and from the Pan-Slavic movement in the mid-19th century to the confrontation of Slavistics between the East and the West in the mid-20th century during the Cold War. The paper highlights the status quo of international Slavic studies and envisions the future development of Slavic studies in China.

Keywords: Slavic studies, Eurasia, International Council for Central and Eastern European Studies (ICCEES), Russian studies (русистика)

1 Definition

Slavic studies, or Slavistics (славяноведение or славистика in Russian) refers to the science of studying the societies and cultures of the Slavic countries. The term “Slavic countries” refers normally to the 13 Slavic countries in Eastern and Central Europe, namely Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine in Eastern Slavonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia in Western Slavonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia of former Yugoslavia. However, some other non-Slavic countries too are often included in Slavic studies, such as Hungary and Romania, countries of former Eastern Bloc, and 12 non-Slavic countries of former Soviet Union—the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan), the three Transcaucasian countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia), the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia), and Moldova. Consequently, the international academia of Slavic studies has begun to use the concept of Eurasia (Евразия), which is broader in all senses, to refer more precisely to its object and scope of study. Also in the definition, “society and culture” cover almost all disciplines of humanities and social sciences, including

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literature, languages, art, philosophy, history, religion, politics, economics, law, and even archeology, medicine, military and science, etc. For this reason, the object of Slavic studies is also referred to as “everything related to Slavs”. In the view of most scholars, suffice it to say that Slavic studies today is almost the area studies (регионоведение), a synthesis of multiple disciplines.

Two more definitions of Slavic studies are to be revisited here. In the Russian edition of the *USSR Encyclopedia*, the first paragraph of the entry Slavistics reads, “Slavistics, the science of Slavic studies, involves interdisciplinary methods to study past and present history, literature, languages, ethnography, economy, art and religion, as well as Slavic material and non-material culture of the Slavs. Things related to the history, culture, and language of any specific Slavic country are usually not included in Slavic studies, but rather, considered in the study of the country’s ancestral history, philology, and other social sciences” (Королюк, 1976, p. 546). And according to the English version of Wikipedia, Slavic studies is the academic field of area studies concerned with Slavic areas, Slavic languages, literature, history, and culture. Originally, a Slavist was primarily a linguist or philologist researching Slavistics, a Slavic scholar. Increasingly historians and other humanists and social scientists who study Slavic area cultures and societies have been included in this rubric (Slavic studies, n.d.).

In sum, Slavistics studies the past and modern material and spiritual culture of the Slavs and of peoples and countries that have been closely related to the Slavs. This fact determines that Slavistics is a large discipline with broad concepts and complex composition, or in other words, an integrated discipline.

2 History

The history of Slavistics has witnessed several phases.

First, the prehistory. Slavistics, in a broad sense, naturally emerges with the Slavic peoples and their sense of autonomy. The earliest records of Slavs appear in ancient Roman literature, dating back to the late 1st and early 2nd century. In his book *Germania*, the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus described the life of early Slavic people, whom were initially referred to as “the Veneti”. It was not until the 9th century that the Slavs ended their primitive communal society and began to enter feudal society. Then the Slavs gradually split into three groups—the East Slavs, the West Slavs and the South Slavs. But surprisingly, the idea of the Slavs integration was commonly reflected in the early literature of all the three groups, such as *Primary Chronicle*, the history of Kievan Rus the early 11th century (also as *The Tale of Bygone Years*), the Chronicle by the Polish historian Gall Anonim in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, *Chronica Boemorum* (Chronicle of

the Czechs) by the first Czech chronicler Kosmas Pražský (1045–1125), and the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* in the mid-12th-century Yugoslavia. Taking the *Primary Chronicle* as an example, at its beginning, after a brief paraphrase of the biblical story, the author¹ describes in detail the origin and division of the Slavs, and then writes “The Slavs were thus separately settled in various places. Their language is called Slavic” (*ПоВестъ Временных лет*, 2010). A Russian literary historian exclaims that the *Chronicle* begins with the origins of Japhetites—the first generation of the Slavs and then moves on to the early history, subdivisions and customs of the Slavs, and that it features “nineteenth-century” characteristics, reflecting the author’s pan-Slavic sentiment and ethnographic interest (Mirsky, 2020). That is to say, as early as the 11th century, a certain “pan-Slavic sentiment” has coincidentally appeared in the ancient literature of the different groups of Slavs, which is the historical prerequisite for the formation of a unified Slavic culture.

Between the 16th and 17th centuries, with the establishment of centralized Slavic states and the direct or indirect influence of the Enlightenment sweeping on the Slavic lands, the development of Slavic language, culture, and civilization was pushed to a new high, which was accompanied by the awakening of the cultural consciousness of various Slavic nations. During this period, the great attention to the history and reality of the Slavs was reflected in many written works. For instance, the Croatian writer Juraj Križanić (c. 1618–1683) called for the “unity of the Slavic nations” in his work; the Yugoslav historian Mavro Orbini (1563–1614) described the history of Slavic groups as a whole and emphasized the Slavic unity in his book *The Realm of the Slavs* (1601); the Polish historian Maciej Strykowski (1547–1593), before others, expressed similar ideas. The awareness of the commonality of the Slavs laid the basis for the emergence of scientific Slavistics. Within the same time frame, the systematic study of the Slavic languages gradually unfolded. In each Slavic country, there emerged encyclopedic figures like the Russian scholar Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–1765), who wrote textbooks and rules of grammar. They made great contributions to the standardization of the written languages of respective peoples, leading to the formation and development of Slavistics in terms of language and literature. The studies of Slavic languages and literature constituted the first batch of Slavic studies.

Slavistics as an independent discipline was formally formed in the middle of the 18th century. From the second half of the 18th century, Slavistics, roughly being a linguistic science, focused on the study of Slavic languages and literature, starting with the publication and examination of ancient literature. This resulted from the upsurge of national liberation movements in the west and south Slavic

¹ Allegedly, the author is Saint Nestor the Chronicler, a monk of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, whose date of birth and death is not known.

countries, from the spreading Enlightenment spirit, and to a certain extent from the Germanization carried out by Austria-Hungary. The scientific Slavistics emerged in the Czech Republic and was formed in some Eastern European countries, marked by several events and figures. First, the Czech scholar Josef Dobrovsky (1753–1829), while promoting the social and political ideal of de-Habsburgization of the Western Slavs, also conducted an in-depth comparative study of the Slavic languages, defining in his works the scope of almost all issues related to the subsequent development of Slavic linguistics, and was therefore revered by later generations as the “father of Slavistics”. Second, the Czech scholar Pavel Jozef Šafárik (1795–1861) compiled the *Ancient Slavic Literature* (1837), which was a collection of important ancient literature from various Slavic countries and later became the foundation of Slavic archeology, ethnography, and comparative study of the history of Slavic languages. Third, the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) was invited to give lectures on Slavic literature at the French Academy (Academie Francaise) in Paris from 1840 to 1844, and his lectures were later published under the title of *Lectures on Slavic Literature* (1841–1849), which became a milestone in Slavic studies, especially in the study of Slavic literature, and played an important role in the dissemination of Slavic literature and culture in Western European countries. Fourth, the First Slavic Congress was held in Prague in 1848, with a number of Slavic scholars and activists gathering there. Fifth, Slavic departments were established at universities in various Slavic countries, such as Moscow State University, St. Petersburg University, Kazan Federal University, and Kharkov National University in Russia; Slavic teaching and research offices were set up in Western European universities, such as the Institut de France in Paris, the University of Vienna, Leipzig University, Free University of Berlin, Eötvös Loránd University, etc.

The second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century witnessed a climax in the development of Slavic studies, with the emergence of a number of specialized Slavic studies journals and Slavic studies societies. The various disciplines of Slavic studies were further differentiated, with linguistic studies still being dominant and studies related to history, ethnography, and literature also gaining significant progress. Henceforth, Slavic studies was gradually transformed from a comprehensive discipline led by linguistics to a combination of various independent disciplines, thus strengthening the academic and scientific nature of Slavic studies. For example, Russian linguistics conducted systematic “academic” studies of Slavic comparative linguistics, ancient Slavic languages, and the history, phonetics, grammar, and dialects of Slavic languages. Fedor Ivanovich Buslaev (1818–1897) formulated the “transplantation theory” through examining ancient Russian and Slavic languages and literature; Aleksandr Afanasevich Potebnia (1835–1891) did the in-depth study of language and thought,

the “internal form” of words and Slavic semantics; Filipp Fedorovich Fortunatov (1848–1914), the founder of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, conducted research on historical comparative linguistics, the history of Russian languages, the history of Slavic languages and formal grammar; Aleksey Aleksandrovich Shakhmatov (1864–1920) lucubrated on the ancient Russian literature and culture, the Russian bibliography and the origin of the Slavs; Y. Veselovsky (1838–1906) created the “Historical Comparative School” based on the generalization of the Slavic literary heritage, etc. During this period, Slavic studies began to expand into sociology, ethnology, history, law, and other fields, and a large number of high-quality scholarly works were published, including the Russian historian I. Pervolv’s *Slavic Reciprocity from Ancient Times to the XVIII Century* (1874), the Czech scholar Lubor Niederle’s (1865–1944) *Slavic Antiquities* (Slovanské starožitnosti) (1–11 volumes, 1902–1934), the Russian historian Matvey Kuzmich Lyubavsky’s *The History of the Western Slavs* (1902–1934), etc. The Slavic studies of this period were supplemented by the growing “Panslavism” (панславизм) movement in the Slavic countries from the middle of the 19th century, one of the main manifestations of which was Slavophilism in Russia.

After the October Revolution, the socialist camp was formed in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union, as the leader of this camp, finally realized Russia’s centuries-old desire to unify the Slavic world. After the establishment of the Soviet Union, especially after the Second World War, the Slavic countries, which were allied politically, militarily, and diplomatically, could indeed be regarded as a socialized Slavic kingdom to some extent. In this ideologically unified world, the commonalities among the Slavic countries received more attention, and the literary and cultural relations between them were explored in detail unprecedentedly. Taking Slavistics in the “Soviet Union” period as an example, from the 1920s to early 1940s, the first works on Slavic literature, Slavic folklore, Slavic accentology, ancient Slavic literature, and Slavic ethnography of the 19th and 20th centuries emerged after the introduction of Marxist research methods. The year 1931 witnessed the establishment of the Institute of Slavic Studies in Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union (институт славяноведения АН СССР) in Leningrad, with the task of comprehensive Slavic studies in the USSR; in the run-up of the Second World War, the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow University and Leningrad University jointly established the research center for Slavic history; and at the turn of 1946 and 1947, a comprehensive central Slavic research institute, later the Institute of Slavistics and Balkan studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, was founded; during the same period, teaching or research departments of Slavistics were established at universities in Leningrad, Kiev, Lviv, Minsk, Voronezh, Saratov, Kharkov, and

the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences; in 1956, the Council of Slavic Scholars of the USSR was established.

At the same time, the confrontation between East and West Europe and the East and West camps during the Cold War caused a split in international Slavistics, which was to some extent reduced to a geopolitical tool and an ideological weapon, making the international Slavic community an academic arena where a constant opposite play was staged. In the West, Slavistics has often become synonymous with Sovietology (советология), a study of socialist institutions and their features and even drawbacks. The competition between the Soviet Union and the United States after World War II had a major impact on the discipline, leading to the emergence of a number of new research centers and academic programs in the West (Elsworth & Kirschbaum, 2010). In fact, during the Cold War, Slavic studies expanded unprecedentedly in Western universities, most of which in Europe and the United States established Slavic or Russian departments, producing a large number of Slavic scholars.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new and significant change in international Slavic studies emerged accordingly. Two statements that the author heard successively in the United States and Russia seem to serve as a graphic summary of this change. At Yale University in the United States, the head of the Slavic Department, upon hearing that the author intended to write an article on international Slavic studies, jokingly said, “Our Slavic studies are dying out here!” A few months later, I asked an academician in St. Petersburg, Russia, about the status quo of Slavistics in Russia, and he said with deep emotion, “Slavistics is now returning to its homeland!” Indeed, in the international Slavic community today, it seems that there is a certain correlation flux between Slavic studies in Russia and other Slavic countries and Slavic studies in non-Slavic European and American countries, but the status and influence of Slavic studies as an interdisciplinary, international, super-regional and comprehensive discipline does not seem to be challenged at present.

3 Today's International Academia of Slavic Studies

At present, there are departments related to Slavic studies at universities in about a hundred countries around the world, some of which own institutions specializing in Slavic studies, such as the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies at Stanford University, and the Center for Russian, the Institute of Slavic, East

European and Eurasian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University in Japan. Most of these countries also have Slavic Studies societies or similar academic groups.

Among the regional academic organizations of Slavic studies, the largest and most influential is probably the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS). Founded in 1938 as the Committee on Slavic Studies, AAASS became a membership organization in 1960 and now has 3500 registered members and more than 40 institutional members. AAASS is affiliated with Harvard University, and its secretariat is located at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. It has a president and several vice presidents and many affiliated committees, such as Language Committee, Education Committee, Women Scholars Committee, Committee for the Nomination of Leaders of the Association, *Slavic Review* Committee, and Documentation Committee, Award Committee, etc. There are also seven regional affiliates, namely Central Slavic Conference, Mid-Atlantic Slavic Conference, Midwest Slavic Conference, New England Slavic Society, Southern Conference on Slavic Studies, Southwestern Slavic Association, Western Association for Slavic Studies. In addition, many special or specialized academic groups in the United States are also considered as chapters of AAASS, such as the American Councils of Teachers of Russian, the Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture, the Institute of USSR Health and Demography, the Association For Women in Slavic Studies, Society for Ancient Slavic Studies, Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies Association, Pushkin Society in America, the Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Folklore Association, the Society of Historians of Eastern European, Eurasian, and Russian Art and Architecture, and the Society for the Study of Slavic and East European Folklore, the Association of Historians of Russian Art and Architecture, and nearly 30 regional research groups, such as the American Association for Ukrainian Studies, Polish Studies Research Group, among others. In 2010, AAASS was renamed the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEES), and its secretariat was moved from Harvard University to the University of Pittsburgh.

In the middle and late 20th century, two international organizations of Slavic scholars predominated: The International Committee of Slavonic Scholars (Международный комитет славистов, МКС), founded in Belgrade in 1955 under the leadership of the Soviet Union, and the International Committee for Soviet and East European Studies (ICSEES), founded in Banff, Canada, in 1974 under the leadership of the United States and Britain. МКС, then composed of 28 national chapters, held international conferences every five years, rotating among the Slavic countries, e.g., it was held in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava in 1929, Warsaw in 1934, Belgrade in 1939 and 1955, Moscow in 1958, Sofia in 1963, Prague in 1968,

Warsaw in 1973, Zagreb in 1978, Kiev in 1983, Sofia in 1988, Bratislava in 1993, Krakow in 1998, Ljubljana in 2003, Ohrid in 2008, Minsk in 2013, and Belgrade in 2018. 2023 will see it held in Paris, France, for the first time in a non-Slavic country. Now the Committee has roughly 40 national members. And the International Committee for Soviet and East European Studies (ICSEES), ever since its establishment, has organized eight world conventions so far, e.g., 1974 in Banff, Canada; 1980 in Garmisch, Germany; 1985 in Washington, D.C., USA; 1990 in Harrogate, UK; 1995 in Warsaw, Poland; 2000 in Finland; 2005 in Berlin, Germany; 2010 in Stockholm, Sweden; 2015 in Chiba, Japan. The 2020 conference was scheduled to be held in Montreal, Canada, but was canceled due to the pandemic coronavirus. In 1993, ICSEES was renamed the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES) (Международный совет по исследованиям Центральной и Восточной Европы). Currently, it is considered the largest and most authoritative international organization of Slavic scholars, hosting international conferences with thousands of attendants. The collapse of the Soviet Union had a profound impact on the ICSEES, which was not limited to the omission of the “S” in the name change.² Prior to 1990, attendance at the conferences from the Soviet side was very limited and consisted of a small number of delegates nominated by official organizations. Since 1990, Russian and Eastern European scholars have been attending the conferences in large numbers in their personal names, contributing significantly to the exchange of information and ideas. In light of the ex facto openness, it is clear that ICCEES will naturally follow this path and become a truly globalized organization (Elsworth & Kirschbaum, 2010).

Since the end of the 19th century, in the course of several decades, various Slavic studies journals have been founded in major European and American countries as well as in various Slavic countries. According to incomplete statistics, there are nearly 100 such journals in the world, among which the most influential ones are: *Slavianovedenie* (Славяноведение, founded in 1965 in Russia and named Советское славяноведение, i.e. *Soviet Slavic Studies* before 1992), *Slavic Review* (founded in 1941 in the United States and currently the membership journal of ASEES), *Slavonic and East European Review* (founded in 1922 in the UK) and *Oxford Slavonic Papers* (founded in 1950 in the UK), *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* (*Journal of Slavic Philology*, founded in 1925 in Germany), *Acta Baltico-Slavica* (founded in 1964 in Poland), and *Slovansky Prehied* (founded in 1898 in Czech Republic), *Словянське мовознавство* (*Slavic Linguistics*, founded in 1958 in Ukraine), *Јужнословенски филолог* (*Yugoslav Linguist*, founded in 1913 in Serbia),

² This is referring to the change of the acronym from ICSEES to ICCEES, with the omitted letter S standing for Soviet Union.

Scando-Slavica (founded in 1954 in Denmark), *Acta Slavica Iaponica* (founded in 1983 in Japan), etc.

4 Slavistics-Related Issues

First of all, Slavic studies are indubitably an important discipline for any country in the world. This is because the Slavs constitute the largest of all European ethnic and linguistic groups. According to statistics, the total population of Slavic peoples is now nearly 300 million, accounting for 40% of the whole population in Europe, whose inhabited area amounts to 18 million square kilometers, accounting for more than 50% of the area of Europe. The Slavs boast long history and rich culture, and their habitations—the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans—embodies rarely seen cultural diversity which facilitates the development of human material and spiritual civilization. However, the Slavic region is also one of the most calamitous regions of the European continent and the whole world. The collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century and the East–West Schism of Christianity in 1054 split the Slavic world into two major parts, namely the Orthodox and Byzantine cultures in the east and the Catholic and Latin cultures in the west, while the Slavs originally in the south were also cut into two groups, with Croatia and Slovenia closer to the West Slavic cultures and Bulgaria and Serbia closer to the East Slavic cultures. Since then, the differences between the Eastern and Western Slavic worlds have gradually emerged. Both world wars in human history originated in this region. It remained a geopolitical battleground throughout the 20th century. Multiple ethnic groups, diverse cultures, complex histories and important geographical locations, colliding civilizations and competing political interests made this region destined to become a worldwide focus of attention. Today, after the end of the Cold War, on the one hand, the division of the Slavic world is further intensifying; on the other hand, there seems to be a force for integration and cultural aspiration, reflected by the introduction or reuse of related concepts, such as Slavia, Slavialand, Slavic Europe, Euroasiatic Cultural Area, etc. In today's world, no country or nation with ambitions and pursuit of interests can ignore Slavic studies as a discipline closely linked with geopolitics and ideology.

Secondly, Slavic studies itself is a very inclusive, comprehensive, and cross-cutting discipline, a rich “mine” with profound academic reserves. The Slavic culture is composed of the intertwinement of the cultures of Slavic peoples which contain similarities in differences, as well as differences in similarities. The Slavic cultural community seems to have more commonalities than the Western European culture dominated by the British, French, and German cultures, which

embodies their differences in their similarities. Yet compared with the Arab culture of the Middle East, the Slavic world shows more division and confrontation between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. Although relations between the Slavic countries have been mixed, the cultural ties between them have been strong and, for at least the last century, have exceeded those between the peoples of the East Asian cultural communities of the same origin. In the midst of the cultural unity, national characteristics are maintained, and a large “Slavic culture” can still cover the separate national cultures, which is unique among the world cultures and civilizations. Taking such a nation, civilization and culture as the object of study, Slavic studies will certainly be a vibrant and varied discipline with immeasurable academic content and potential. Here, the formation of Jacobson’s structuralist vision is applied to illustrate. In order to attend the Slavic Conference in Prague in 1929, Jacobson wrote an article entitled “Contemporary Perspectives of Russian Slavistics” («О современных перспективах русской славистики»), which appeared in the German journal *Slavische Rundschau*. In this article, Jacobson presented his structuralist theoretical framework based on the constitutive model of Slavic culture, outlining the basic contours of structuralist thought. In turn, when later involved in the establishment of American Slavic Studies, Jacobson used a structuralist approach to construct his disciplinary vision and model. In other words, Jacobson found the connection and gains bilateral revelatory character between Slavistics and structuralism. It is believed that the rich and diverse composition of Slavic studies will continue to provide such academic output as long as we can dig more deeply and explore more carefully.

What’s more, “Russiology” (русистика), or Russian studies, has always prevailed in Slavic studies. Although Slavistics first appeared in Czech and Dubrovsky, the “father of Slavistics”, was Czech, its main battlefield soon gradually moved to Russia. Since the emergence of Slavistics, Russia has been the leading country in the Slavic world in terms of size and population, as well as international influence and cultural soft power. The prominence of Russia in the two Patriotic Wars of 1812 and of 1941–1945, and the strong radial power of the Russian Revolution, made it a self-described and widely recognized leader of the Slavic nations. Many Slavic scholars in the Slavic countries often showed varying degrees of pro-Russian sentiment, and Russia in its period of strength attended to patronize and culturally enlist its Slavic brothers. Looking back at the history of Slavistics and Pan-Slavism in the Slavic countries, there is an easily noticeable interesting phenomenon that all Slavic scholars with academic achievements in the Slavic countries were often appointed as foreign members or foreign corresponding members of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and almost all of the renowned Slavic scholars and Pan-Slavist activists in the Slavic countries had

different shades of association with Russia—either lived or worked in Russia for a long time, thus leading to the Russia's prominence in this academic field. During the USSR period, Slavic studies were often equated with “Soviet studies” in the minds of many western Slavic scholars. This situation took a turn after the collapse of USSR, but it can hardly change the fact that the western Slavic community is still paying disproportionate attention to Russian studies when it comes to Slavic studies. The Slavic Department at Yale University, for instance, has 14 faculty members, all of whom are engaged in teaching and researching Russian language and literature, with the exception of three faculty members who study Polish, Czech, and Yugoslavian languages and literature, and five professors who are all experts in Russian literature. The same is true of Slavic departments in other universities in the United States and other European countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many institutions of Slavic studies in Europe and the United States changed their names in order to keep the non-Slavic countries in the former Soviet Union within their scope of study. That being said, the word “Russia” is still singled out in these new names, along with such concepts as “Eastern Europe” and “Central and Eastern Europe”, “Central Asia” and “Eurasia”, which also highlights the emphasis on Russian studies in the overall Slavic studies from another perspective.

The last point relates to the prospects of Slavic studies in China. Since China's Revolution of 1911 and the May 4th Movement, Russian culture, with Russian literature as its core, together with French Enlightenment ideas and German Marxism, has constituted the three major ideological sources of the New Cultural Movement. After the Russian October Revolution (1917), socialist ideology and state system were imported into China, mainly from Soviet Russia, exerting influence in Chinese society, politics, economy and culture in a comprehensive manner. Against such a historical background, the status and role of Slavic culture in China, represented by Russian literature and culture, exceeds the imagination of the general public. Slavistics was actually established in China at an early stage and has achieved very fruitful results. When the present author addressed at an international conference that about one-third of all the translated works in China were translated from Russian, the audience from Europe and the United States was amazed; when the author showed foreign scholars around the vast catalog of Russian translations and works in China's National Library, they were also dumbfounded. In other words, China's Slavistics, with its long history and outstanding achievements, has become an important piece in the puzzle of the world's Slavic studies. Nevertheless, China's research strength and output have not been fully recognized in the international Slavic community for a long time, which is partly due to the poor promotion of academic results. In the middle of the 20th century, when the development of Slavistics was at its

strongest, China were largely isolated from the western academic community, and soon afterward, it held a hostile relationship with the Soviet Union, followed by a decade of turmoil, which led to a complete stagnation of the once well-developed Russian and Slavic studies in China for almost 30 years. It was not until the reform and opening-up when China's Slavistics developed rapidly together with other academic fields. Today, the China Russian Society for East European and Central Asian Studies has been enlisted as a member of ICCEES, and more and more Chinese Slavic scholars are appearing at various international academic events in Slavistics and publishing papers in relevant international academic journals. China has hosted high-level conferences including Congress of the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL) and the China-Japan-South Korean Forum on Slavistics, not to mention dozens of international seminars and forums related to Slavistics every year. In recent years, Slavic studies in China seems to have reached a climax. Many universities have established institutes and research centers related to Slavic studies, including the Beijing Slavic Research Center at Capital Normal University and the Slavic Language College at Harbin Normal University. And the forthcoming *Chinese Journal of Slavic Studies* founded by Beijing Foreign Studies University, can be regarded as the latest sign of this academic boom. The current boom in China's Slavic Studies emerged as the time requires. Firstly, a new context has been created by the changes in international geopolitics. On the one hand, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially in the last decade or so, with the expansion of NATO to the east and the tensions between Russia and the United States and between Russia and Europe, other former Soviet republics and Slavic countries in Central and Eastern Europe have begun to "de-Russify" or even "de-Slavify" by alienating themselves from Russia, making Russia lose its leading position in the Slavic world. Against this background, Slavistics, which was originally a product of the ethnic community sentiment of maintaining the unity of the Slavic world, naturally suffers from a coincidental coldness in Russia and other Slavic countries. On the other hand, it goes without saying that the rise of Slavic studies in Europe and America in the middle of the 20th century was closely related to the background of the Cold War between East and West. Yet, the Soviet Union collapsed, the Slavic world itself ceased to be a unified political and cultural block, and the Central and Eastern European countries turned to Europe and America and rapidly became "Euro-Americanized". After all the events, the interest in Slavic studies in the Western world seems to have declined as never before. This international geopolitical context, nonetheless, provides a rare opportunity for the rise of China's Slavistics. Chinese Slavic scholars, as on-lookers and neutrals, can conduct their research more from an objective perspective by taking in the previous experience and results of Slavic studies in

Russia, Europe, and America. Secondly, this academic boom in Slavistics came as a requirement for scholars by China's national development strategy. At a time when globalization is being challenged and the game of great powers is becoming increasingly intense, China attaches more importance to the interaction and cooperation with CEE and Eurasian countries. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS cooperation mechanism, the cooperation mechanism between China and CEE countries, and especially the Belt and Road Initiative are all more or less related to the Slavic world. The operation and development of these international organizations and cooperation mechanisms need enormous professional, timely and effective academic research as a support. It is thus believed that in these two major contexts, Slavic studies in China will inevitably embrace faster growth and that Chinese Slavic scholars will play an increasingly vital role on the stage of the world's Slavic studies.

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