

## Book Review

*Deguo Hanxue Yanjiu Shigao* 德国汉学研究史稿 [A Historical Outline of German Sinology, in two Vols.], by **Xuetao Li**. Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2021.

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After returning to China in 2004 from the University of Bonn, Professor Xuetao Li has been devoting his time to the studies of German sinology, modern German philosophy and the history of Buddhism. Though his published books and articles cover a variety of topics, there is a central line connecting them, which is a question that he attempts to answer in different ways and verify with different cases: how a foreign civilization can be integrated into a native one and what are the forces that make this cultural exchange happen? While he illustrates Karl Jaspers' theory of "communication" in his research of German philosophy and illuminates the "grafting" of Indian thought to Chinese culture in his writings of the history of Buddhism, in the studies of German sinology, Professor Li focuses on analysing the life, thought and intellectual environment of the overseas Chinese students as well as the German sinologists, with a special attention to their interactions in Germany, China, and the other parts of the world. His latest book, *A Historical Outline of German Sinology*, (2021) provides us with his consistent thinking to the question and his unchanging concern with the growth and development of a living civilization.

As is indicated by the name of the book, it does not include a general history of German sinology; rather the book is based on individual case studies. It consists of 19 articles dealing with 19 specific questions, and each article is presented as a chapter. They are further divided into five parts: Historical Divisions and Bibliographies; Language, Literature and Translation; Paradigms and Institutions; Interactions and Criticism; Special History and Historical Review.

## Part I contains four chapters

Chapter 1 "The Historical Divisions of German Sinology and the Related Documents" first introduces the different divisions of the history of Germany sinology. Then professor Xuetao Li divides German sinology into four stages: (1) the pre-sinology stage, which refers to the sinological studies before the 19th century.

Missionaries and their contemporary thinkers were the major agents of the related studies, and reports, journals and letters were the major documents to record their achievements. Chinese culture, especially the elements of Confucianism were selected and adapted to meet the demands of rationalism and enlightenment then popular in Europe. (2) The beginning and preliminary stage, which covers the 19th century. Sinology was still a branch of general linguistics and oriental studies, and sinologists selected their research domain according to their taste and interest, which could hardly yield any professional sinologist with full knowledge of China. (3) The rapid development stage, which refers to the first half of the 20th century. The marking event was the establishment of the Department of Sinology in the Hamburg Colonial Institute (now the University of Hamburg) in 1909. (4) The shift stage from Sinology to China Studies, which refers to the second half of the 20th century. The typical event was the establishment of the Faculty of East Asian Studies in Ruhr University Bochum. (pp. 8–9) As professor Li said, the history of German Sinology does not refer specifically to the studies of China in Germany since its unification in 1871. Geographically it actually includes the German-speaking regions in Austria and certain parts of Switzerland. Therefore, German Sinology involves scholars from many different European countries and it is not easy to define a distinctive German characteristic of the sinological studies in Europe. Generally speaking, the characteristic of German sinology lies in its own history and culture while at the same time making full use of the European historical and humanistic approaches to the studies of Chinese culture. (p. 4) This chapter sets up the framework as well as the tone for the following sections and discussions.

Chapter 2 deals with the pre-sinology stage and provides several case studies such as Marco Polo (1254–1324) and his travels in China; Jesuits' accommodation of Chinese culture and their influence on such European intellectual as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). Special attention was given to typical events, persons, letters, reports and books produced in this period.

Chapter 3 examines the beginning and preliminary stage of German sinology at the turn of the 19th century and the 20th century. Some influential figures and their achievements, such as Karl Friedrich Neumann (1793–1870), who bought 12,000 copies of rare books and manuscripts in China and brought more than 6000 copies back to Germany, giving them respectively to the Munich library and the Berlin library which had laid a solid foundation for the later development of sinological studies; the linguist Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1807–1874), the German–American sinologist Friedrich Hirth (1845–1927), and the missionary sinologist Karl Friedrich Gutzlaff (1803–1850). The collection of books, the establishment of libraries and professional institutions, and the special focus on Chinese language, history and minorities, together with the scientific method applied

in sinology marked the transition from amateur sinology to professional sinological studies.

Chapter 4 introduces the Chinese books kept in the Prussian Royal Library of Berlin (Berlin State Library today) based on two bibliographies: one was compiled by Heinrich Julius Klaproth (1783–1835) entitled *Catalogues of Books and Manuscripts in Chinese and Manchu Language in the Royal Library of Berlin* (1822), and the other was compiled by Wilhelm Schott (1802–1889) entitled *Catalogues of Books and Manuscripts in Chinese and Manchu-Tungusic languages in the Royal Library of Berlin* (1840). Professor Li traces the history of these collections and discusses in details some important books and Chinese officials visiting the royal library. Both of them are collected in the catalogue compiled by John Rust entitled *Western Books on China Published up to 1850* which is kept at the library of School of Oriental and African Studies in London University. It has been made into microfilms by Inter Documentation Company and become an important database for the studies of the cultural exchange between the east and the west in the early years. Professor Li also attaches the catalogues to this article, which is an important guide for those who are interested in this history. (pp. 80–117).

## **Part II has six chapters which centre on four German sinologists and their studies**

Chapter 5 introduces Gabelentz's doctoral dissertation about Dunyi Zhou's *Illustrated Explanation of the Taiji Diagram*, which is "a philological translation and interpretation of a philosophical text". (p. 126) Professor Li discusses Stanislas Julien (1797–1873) and his translation of *The Book of the Way and of Virtue* (1856) as well as Victor von Strauss (1809–1890) and his translation of *Lao-Tse's Tao Te King* (1870). In his translation of the *Dao De Jing*, Strauss used the German philosophical terms to express Lao Zi's ideas in order to introduce Chinese thought to the German intellectual world; and he also compared Lao Zi's ideas with those of western philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), which was generally the widely practiced way in the west when these two cultures first met each other. (p. 131) Gabelentz's principle was to faithfully represent the form as well as the thought of the original work. So he chose multiple interpretations and evaluated them in an objective way, revealing the linguistic problems in understanding Chinese classics. (p. 130) In Gabelentz's view, language was the stepping stone to the understanding of philosophy, which to some extent reflected the linguistic turn of philosophy. As a linguist Gabelentz was well-known, but his doctoral

dissertation remained unknown to the world except for only a few scholars, which indicates the significance of this chapter.

Chapter 6 is an overview of the reception of Chinese literature in Germany in the 18th and the 19th centuries based on Hartmut Walravens' article "Germany's Early Knowledge of Chinese Literature" collected in his latest book *Chinese Plays, Novels, Essays, and Poems in German Language in 18th and 19th Century* (2016). As a staff member in the Asian and African Department of the Berlin State Library, Walravens had the advantage of tracing the early works of Chinese literature in the German-speaking world. He listed the newly-found versions of *zhao shi gu er* (*The Orphan of China*), *wang jiao luan bai nian chang hen* (*The Lasting Resentment of Miss Keaou Lwan Wang*), *mu lan ci* (*Lyric of Hua Mu Lan*) and the early translations of Confucian classics such as *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*). Professor Li points out that the themes in Chinese literature, such as sorrow, grief, everyday life and natural scenery provide different concerns with the western literature which are considered closer to humanity. In this sense the translation of Chinese literature is neither the accurate equivalence to nor the free rewriting of the original. There are both correspondence and disparity, and the result should be a rebirth of the original work. Translation by nature is a cultural adaption based on the experience of the translator's native language. (p. 172) Chinese literature in the vision of the European literature is totally different from Chinese literature in its own vision. Translation works as a kind of dialogue in which the fusion of horizons is necessarily involved.

Chapter 7–9 deal with Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930) and his translations of Chinese classics. Chapter 7 discusses Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching* and the original Chinese books he consulted based on the archives of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The process and working style of Wilhelm's cooperation with Naixuan Lao (1843–1921) in translating the *I Ching* is examined and analysed, and Professor Li listed the 23 Chinese books about the *Yijing* that Wilhelm possessed, including the imperial version of *zhouyi zhezong* (*Balanced Compendium on the Zhou Changes*, 1715) compiled by Guangdi Li (1642–1718), which was considered the original book Wilhelm used in his translation. Chapter 8 discusses Wilhelm's translation of the *Mengzi* based on the 14 original Chinese books related to it and some other translations found in the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. (p. 193) Chapter 9 is related to Wilhelm's cooperation with Shutao Zhou (1891–1984) in translating Kant's book *On the Power of the Mind to Master its Morbid Feelings by Sheer Resolution*, which was published in 1914 and was the first translation of Kant's work in China. Wilhelm's life and his cooperation with many Chinese scholars was a topic that can never be exhausted. As a cultural messenger, he is the perfect example to show how two different cultures can

co-exist, understand and absorb the necessary parts of each other. Besides these three articles, Professor Li also wrote interesting stories about Wilhelm's stay in China and his relation with the Shutao Zhou family.

Chapter 10 discusses Franz W. Kuhn (1884–1961) and his translation of Chinese novels. Kuhn translated 13 Chinese novels into German and many of his translations were based on the hua-ben tales of the Ming and Qing dynasties, among them were *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in Golden Vase*, 1930), *Hong Lou Meng* (*A Dream of Red Mansions*, 1951), and *Rou Pu Tuan* (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*, 1959). His translation is more of a rewriting and adaption than a faithful representation of the original work in the conventional sense. Kuhn's sensitivity to language and his aesthetic taste helped to promote Chinese culture to the world. (p. 251) The study of Kuhn's translation is very interesting and useful in terms of cultural interaction which sheds new light on those controversial translators such as Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883), Shu Lin (1852–1924) and Ezra Pound (1885–1972).

### Part III contains two chapters

Chapter 11 discusses Otto Franke (1862–1946) and the paradigm shift of sinological studies in Europe. In the 19th century, sinology was enlisted in the university as a branch of the Oriental studies, but it still inherited the tradition and research interest of the Jesuits and focused on studying Chinese language and translating Chinese classics. German scholars made great achievements in historical linguistics and the analysis of ancient languages and texts found in the middle Asia. Their philological approach to sinology and Buddhism proved very effective and fruitful in Europe. In this context, Otto Franke attempted to apply historical theories and approaches into the studies of the history of China, critically reading and reviewing Chinese text, and using interdisciplinary principles to interpret Chinese classics and cultural tradition, which is regarded as a paradigm shift from the previously popular archeological and philological interests and methods. More importantly, Otto Franke was one of the important figures who turned their eyes from ancient China to modern China.

Chapter 12 is a historical review of the Department of Sinology in the University of Bonn. Sinology originally belonged to the Department of Oriental Studies (1926–1963), and Erich Schmitt (1893–1955) was the first professor specialized in the studies of Chinese language. In 1963 an individual Institute of Sinology was established, and Peter Olbricht (1909–2001) became the first professor chaired the institute. Then professor Rolf Trauzettl (1930–2019), and the renowned graduates Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (1948–), Wolfgang Kubin (1945–) ushered the sinology in

the University of Bonn to a new era. Kubin saw to it that the studies of Chinese literature become the distinctive feature of the institute. The 10 volumes *History of Chinese Literature* edited by him marked the greatest achievement ever made in the sinological studies in Germany. As a student and assistant teacher there, Professor Li introduces many Chinese students with similar experience in the University of Bonn, among whom were the first Chinese teacher Dr. Fanguan Li (李范观, the author's dates are unknown), Congwu Yao (姚从吾, 1894–1970), Guangqi Wang, (王光祈, 1891–1936), Yi Lu (陆懿, 1910–1939), Wei Xiong (熊伟, 1911–1994) and the female teacher Chengru Wang (王澄如, 1909–?). Professor Li wrote more extensive and detailed articles about them, due to the nature and length of this sketch book they are not included, but their overall significance to the development of German sinology is made clear.

## Part IV consists of three chapters

Chapter 13 discusses the interaction between Chinese and German academic circles in Peiping in the time of the Republic of China. During the Second World War, a lot of German sinologists fled from Germany to Peiping, which made the city a centre for sinological studies. Among the famous sinologists were Gustav Ecke (1896–1971) who co-started the sinological journal *Monumenta Serica*, Richard Wilhelm and his son Hellmut Wilhelm (1905–1990) who managed to bridge the contradictory and complementary parts of the east and the west. These German sinologists generally showed great respect and love for Chinese culture, and they also used modern scientific methods to study Chinese classics and put forward many new ideas, which were admitted and followed by Chinese scholars, such as Ecke's studies of ancient China's meteorology (p. 326). They set up the German Institute in Peiping (1932), the Institute of Oriental Studies (1936), and various libraries, publishing houses, and professional journals. They formed a cooperative and mutually-benefiting relationship with the Chinese scholars and students. Extreme nationalism was confronted with sinological studies, which in a sense speeded up the establishment of modern Chinese academic system. In the meanwhile, China studies had gained international fame and acknowledgement with the involvement of these sinologists.

Chapter 14 is a description of the friendship between Alfred Hoffmann (1911–1997) and Yusheng Long (1902–1966). Hoffmann came to China in 1940 and was sent to Nanjing in 1943, where he spent two years and became a friend of Long, a famous Chinese ci-lyric composer and expert who shared his interest with Hoffmann in the traditional ci-lyric. Long wrote 3 ci-lyrics respectively in 1945, 1954 and 1956 to recollect their friendship and eulogize their past time. Professor Li

analysed these lyrics with the background of Hoffmann's life in China and Germany after he returned there in 1947. In a sense, Hoffman and Long shared a tragic fate due to their experience in the war, and the sadness was integrated both in Hoffmann's study of the last emperor of the Southern Tang dynasty Yu Li (937–978) and Long's composing of new lyrics followed the tune used by Yu Li. Professor Li's illustration clarified many incidents of their lives and added detailed notes to the understanding of Long's three lyrics.

Chapter 15 discusses German sinologists' criticism of the China studies in America. As we know, pragmatism and contextualism dominated the humanistic studies in the United States for many years. Alfred Forke (1867–1944) who worked in the University of California, Berkeley from 1914 to 1918 spoke very lightly of the sinological studies in the United States. Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) and Wolfgang Kubin also criticized American sinologists' materialism. In Kubin's opinion, European sinologists aimed at highlighting the differences between China and Europe, while American sinologists tended to seek similarities and even sameness between these two cultures. (p. 372) Heiner Roetz (1950–) reminded us the distinction between is-ought and fact-value in scientific research, especially in culture studies. On the one hand American scholars easily fell prey to using the west as the standard to evaluate the historical practice in China; on the other hand they believed that the concepts and ideas sprung up in the west could be traced their origin in the east, such as the hermeneutic ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was brought about to accommodate Mencius' thought. We should be wary of essentialism and universalism in humanistic studies. In this sense, the embracement of post-colonialism and a special keenness to novel theories in China Studies of the United States are surly not agreeable to the taste of the German sinologists.

## Part V contains four chapters

Chapter 16 deals with Wolfgang Franke (1912–2007) and the 13 years he spent in China (1937–1950), which is an autobiographical sketch of Franke's life and his achievements in the field of sinology. Professor Li's extensive exploration of Franke's life illustrates the mutual interaction between intellectuals of China and Germany.

Chapter 17 introduces Wolfgang Kubin's *A History of Chinese Literature* and his views to Chinese literature. This 10-volume series provides a panoramic view of Chinese literature, and at the same time mingles it into the streams of world literature. Professor Li exposes the three red lines of Kubin's narration of Chinese poetry: religion, melancholy and individualism, which distinguished Kubin's book

from other compilations of its kind; and he also discusses Kubin's views to modern Chinese writers and their works. Modernity is the key Professor Li grasps to the understanding of Kubin and his books.

Chapter 18 discusses German sinologists' studies of the history of technology in China in the first half of the 20th century, and reveals their contribution in the perspective of analysing Chinese science and technology, in the coinage of new technical terms, and in the establishment of modern divisions of scientific and social studies.

Chapter 19 is the historical review of the development of German sinology in the past 50 years, which introduces the latest development and the representative works. Professor Li also provides his observation of the future studies and holds that the application of the methods in social science to the studies of German sinology, trans-disciplinary and combinative studies represent the future trend.

As Professor Li says, the fundamental concern in his studies of the history of German sinology is the interactive relationship between Chinese civilization and German, or to be more exact, western civilization. Therefore, he manages to expose the various ways that concepts, ideas and theories circulate beyond local, regional and national boundaries; to illustrate the changing environment created by different agents, institutions and ideologies when they compete for power; and to discuss the transmissions, translations, and transmutations that a text, discourse or cultural practice undergo in the process of a cross-cultural journey.

In this book, Professor Li provides many cases to show the visible history of German sinology, but there is an invisible Chinese intellectual history which parallelizes with the development of German sinology. Professor Li wants to explore the role that German sinology plays in the modern transformation of Chinese academic system, and to position the interactions between German and Chinese intellectuals in the perspective of global history.

Professor Li proposes to study the intellectual history of sinology in his book *Dialogues of Misunderstanding* (2008), in which he establishes a hermeneutical framework for the discussions of overseas sinology. In the present book, he stresses five principles: intercultural comparative perspective, holistic view, interactive view, deconstruction of the west-centrism and the use of interdisciplinary approaches. They are summarized as the major characteristics of the book. Besides these principles, I think there are at least three distinctive features of the book, which are the pillars that underpin most of Professor Li's writings.

First and foremost is his stress on primary sources. In his first book about German sinology *German Academic Genealogy: A History of German Sinology* (2008) Professor Li had already made wide use of archives, documents and rare books to locate his studies in the contemporary contexts. He frequently speaks of the importance of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and his principle of source-



based history: focussing on archival research and the analysis of historical documents. As he told us in his studies of the linguist Gabelentz, he met in person Gabelentz's niece Annemete von Vogel who provided many family photos and original documents, such as the first edition of *Die Chinesische Grammatik* (*Chinese Grammar*, 1881), which is used in this book. He also obtained Gabelentz's notebook for *Die Sprachwissenschaft* (*Linguistics*, 1891) from the archives of Altenburg, and Gabelentz's doctoral dissertation from the archives of Leipzig University, which become solid basis for his analysis and findings. As professor Li said, without cautious distinguishing and selection of the historical documents, thorough analysis of the sinologists, their books and the era they lived in, there would be no foundation for a holistic view.

Second is his emphasis on the close reading of documents, texts and their translations. This close reading is not for the purpose of checking the faithfulness of the translations, but to locate the text in its exact time and place, and to evaluate its significance according to its original context. As professor Li said, German sinology was constructed on translations, and on the pre-sinology stage, much of the German knowledge about China was actually based on the retranslations from Latin, French or even English translations. The significance of the studies of this early stage lies not in the criticism of the unfaithful representation of China in early Europe, but in the rewriting, recreation and rebirth of China in another civilization. In terms of cultural communication, the value of Strauss' *Lao Tse* lies more in its influence on such German philosopher as Karl Jaspers, the significance of *The Orphan of the House Zhao* lies more on its inspiration to Goethe's idea of world literature, and the importance of Richard Wilhelm lies more in his role as a cultural messenger than in his professionalism as a German sinologist. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer wants to convey in his "fusion of horizons" and it is also the hermeneutic framework Professor Li manages to explain the significance of "dialogues of misunderstanding".

Last is his special focus on intellectuals and their interactions. In this book we read many vivid descriptions of German sinologists as if they were our friends. We see the father and son sinologists Otto Franke and Wolfgang Franke, Richard Wilhelm and Hellmut Wilhelm; we see the teacher and student interaction between Naixuan Lao and Richard Wilhelm, Yusheng Long and Alfred Hoffmann; we also see the hint of the close ties between the Wilhelm family and the Zhou family, which is another story yet to be told in his future book. In Professor Li's writing we can see clearly a humanistic concern about the joys and sorrows, the likes and dislikes, the life and death of German sinologists as living beings with human feelings, instead of as a series of dull, monotonous scholarly faces sticking to esoteric terms and theories. In order to revive Gabelentz's achievements and contributions, Professor Li organized an international symposium in April 2017

with the theme of “Gabelentz as Sinologist and Linguist” in Beijing Foreign Studies University, and he also arranged an exhibition of Gabelentz’s life with many photos, rare books and even the glasses Gabelentz once wore. In this way he established intimate contact with the German sinologists he intended to write.

The history of German sinology is an entangled history, in which Chinese objects was observed and analysed in German cultural tradition and with German categories, paradigms and approaches. How to critically reconstruct this history is surely not an easy task, and Professor Li’s book provides us with a solid basis on which more comprehensive and thorough studies can and will be established.