

Book Review

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Bernhard Führer

*Vergessen und verloren: Die Geschichte der österreichischen Chinastudien
(Lost and Forgotten: The History of Austrian Chinese Studies).*

Bochum: projekt verlag, 2001, 371 pages. ISSN 0946-2325; ISBN 3-89733-017-2.

This historical overview of Austrian Chinese studies from the seventeenth century to the present by Bernhard Führer, Lecturer in Classical Chinese Philosophy and Language at the school of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, defines its aims as follows: Austrian Chinese studies are firstly being put into perspective by focusing on the development of the academic discipline in the larger context of the paradigmatic history of Chinese studies. The text is secondly meant to be working against “forgetting” in a scholarly environment, where remembering and working on the past (of the discipline) is quite often given second place to the formidable task of trying to be “up-to-date” (p. 7). The book is thirdly meant to take stock of what was “lost” for Chinese studies in Austria and in the German speaking world in the following sense: The text not only deals with scholars in Chinese studies who have been working in Austria, but also incorporates those who had — mainly for political reasons during the Nazi Regime — to leave Austria and never were really invited back. Their contributions to the develop-

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ment of Chinese studies through teaching and publishing in different countries and institutions are incorporated into the text, though they were “lost” for a possibly more lively and more positive development in Austria (pp. 9-10).

Some biographical information on the scholars dealt with are given, but usually only insofar as they can directly or indirectly illuminate the scholarly undertakings of the person in question. The author concentrates instead mainly “on a critical discussion of research results relevant to Chinese studies” (p. 21). He focuses on the influence this research had on the discipline and the interest it found in a broader conceived discourse of Chinese and Asian studies. The work’s English abstract states, “Apart from published material, the author also includes a wealth of unpublished research work found in libraries and archives in Austria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The book incorporates detailed investigations of the source material, descriptions of state-of-the-art research at the time, and a discussion of these contributions in the light of the international Sinological discourse past and present. Book reviews, personal correspondence, discussions of personal affiliations and feuds offer further insights into the intellectual background of these scholars, their aims, concerns and methodological approaches.” This rather sophisticated concept of evaluating research results published between the seventeenth century and the present constitutes one of the strong points of Führer’s book. *Vergessen und verloren* is not merely a collection of dates, names, titles and anecdotes of Austrian scholars in Chinese studies—though the book is full of this kind of information too, especially valuable because their reliability, based on the painstaking and untiring efforts of the author in collecting and verifying them. The cited concept of evaluating published and unpublished research results of a discipline over such a long period leads at the same time, as can easily be seen, to methodological intricacies, of which the author is fully aware (see p. 7): obituaries are bound to follow rhetorical conventions, (*de mortuis nil nisi bene*), book reviews can also be used defending one school against the other or for personal vendettas, etc.

1. The contents of the book

Following the preface Führer tries to locate the book within the framework of published studies on the development of the discipline (introduction). The main body of the text is structured along four time periods: “The beginnings,” a first short chapter, covers precursors of Chinese studies originating in Austria from the 17th and 18th century (pp. 23-41). The second period, “From the nineteenth century to Nazism” (pp. 43-197), is divided into two sections: the development in Austria and emigrants from Austria. The term “emigrants” stands for two expressions Führer uses in this context: “Auswanderer,” that is to say people who out of their own free will left Austria to study, teach, or do research somewhere else in the world and “Emigranten,” people who had to leave Austria for political reasons. The third period, “From Nazism to 1972” (pp. 199-289), is again divided into the above mentioned sections. “Chinese studies in Austria since 1972” (when for the first time an “Institut für Sinologie” was established at the University of Vienna as well as other government financed institutes for research on China), is a short concluding chapter on the latest institutionalized Chinese studies in Austria today (pp. 291-324). In a thoughtful postscript Führer muses about the lost chances of Chinese studies in Austria, a country which has — as he states it — neglected this field from the beginning to the present. The book concludes with a select bibliography (pp. 347-362) and an index (pp. 363-371).

The text explicitly deals with more than forty people, originating in Austria and working in Chinese studies. Some names are well known, others nearly “forgotten.” They cover a broad range of interests and have pursued these quite often outside of institutional backing. In order to do justice to the complexity of Führer’s approach, I will in the following remarks try to elaborate on its special features by analysing two individual chapters.

2. “A failed crusade against the establishment”: Erwin von Zach

Erwin von Zach (1872-1942) is dealt with in the longest single chapter in the second time period (pp. 157-187). Though the title is catchy, it expresses a very central feature of Zach's character and work style. It points though only at one of the two main points that Führer is driving at in this chapter. Führer correctly considers von Zach to be the internationally most influential China scholar born in Austria (p. 157). Zach was born in Vienna, studied medicine at the University of Vienna, and worked for a while (1901-1919) in the foreign service of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. For the rest he was an “Auswanderer,” as he got his training in Asian studies in Leiden (and Oxford?), worked in the Chinese maritime customs service (in the late 1890s) as well as for the Austro-Hungarian foreign office in Singapore, Beijing and other places, and lived as a private scholar in Indonesia (pp. 157-160 *passim*).

Some of the special features of the book are clearly evident in this chapter. First, the reader is not given any coherent if rudimentary biographical overview, as this would fall outside of the authors concept. Readers who are not familiar with the details will find this definitively a handicap and a bother.¹ Führer directly goes into the two main points he considers the most important about Zach within his concept of evaluating his scholarly approach and products in an historical, disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary, and institutional context. At the beginning the author recounts Zach's uncompromising, blistering and also personal style of criticising his colleagues, his teachers and everybody else in the field, whenever—and that was quite often—he found mis-

1 I should point out though that in note no. 1 of this (like all the other chapters) Führer gives a detailed account of the multitude or scarcity of biographical literature on the person dealt with. This bibliographical note not only includes references to unpublished materials but also Führer's reflections on the desiderata, the questions left unanswered by these obituaries, etc. Since this literature is usually very dispersed and hard to find, Führer is to be especially thanked for taking the trouble to piece it together.

takes in and faults with their work. Since Führer is of the opinion that this aspect of Zach's character and work style in many ways influenced his work and his carrier. Therefore, he quotes extensively Zach's tirades and the replies of different lumina on the Sinological horizon of the day. Of course this type of prose is also the stuff which brings alive serious scholars and their work, and Führer is definitively aware of the importance of making scholarly research also good reading.

The second point concerns Zach's main contribution to the development of the field: his lexicographical studies as well as his translations from the massive body of classical Chinese literature. Again the investigation is done by quoting extensively from Zach's own reflections about the main thrust and the urgency of his work as well as from reactions by specialists of the field (in the case of his lexicographical studies mainly Paul Pelliot, Herbert Giles, Erich Hähnisch and others, in the case of his translations mainly Peter A. Boodberg, William Hung, A.R. Davis, J.J.L. Dyvendak, Arthur Waley and others). This way of approaching the subject is highly illuminating by giving the reader insight into several levels of the discursive development of the discipline: the interconnectedness of personal training, institutional grounding, and integration into the mainstream paradigms of a period, which are in sum the main parameters contributing to the formation of scholar personalities as agents of change and forward movement.² This type of approach should induce younger readers, who in their training sometimes only are provided with sporadic insights into the history of their discipline, to start digging up the past, in order to better understand the present challenges. This intention to recover the "forgotten" for future generations, one of Führer's stated goals for writing the

2 A recent volume on the history of different scholarly disciplines, resulting from a series of lectures at the faculty of the humanities, University of Vienna, has to a certain extent tested this type of approach. See: Dressel, Gert/Bernhard Ratmayr (ed.): *Mensch-Gesellschaft-Wissenschaft. Versuche einer Reflexiven Historischen Anthropologie* (Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaftliche Studententexte. Bd.2, Studia Universitätsverlag, Innsbruck 1999).

book (pp. 6-7), is, considering the fact, that it comes from a young scholar in the field (Führer was born in 1960), especially noteworthy.

3. “The most important personality for the development of the discipline (of Chinese studies) in Austria” (p. 116): Arthur von Rosthorn

Arthur von Rosthorn (1862-1945) is also discussed at length as one of the outstanding China scholars born in Austria and having worked nearly two decades at the University of Vienna. He was born in Vienna, began to study Sanskrit as well a comparative linguistics at the University of Vienna and went to Oxford for further studies (where he worked with James Legge among others) in 1882. He joined the Imperial (Chinese) maritime customs service a year later, but came back to Oxford and James Legge in 1893. After getting his doctoral degree in Leipzig in 1895, he worked in the foreign service of the Austro-Hungarian empire from 1896 to 1918. Von Rosthorn became a corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Science in 1919 and started teaching Chinese language, literature and history at the University of Vienna in 1922. He stopped teaching at the university in 1938, but continued publishing and reading papers at the Academy of Science (pp. 97-109 *passim*).

This chapter on Rosthorn elaborates, next to a detailed analysis of Rosthorn's published papers and books in the context of research on China at that time, the question of Rosthorn's contribution to the institutionalization of Sinology in Vienna, which can be considered at several levels. He collected a respectable collection of Chinese books (more than 10,000 volumes, many of them acquired while serving as a diplomat in Beijing), which served as the research library for his teaching and research at the university, and was bought by the Austrian national library in Vienna after his death (“Rosthorn-Sammlung”). While the Habsburg monarchs had accumulated a rich collection of materials on the early period of Western-Chinese relations in Western lan-

guages (Führer refers to some of these materials in his footnotes), Rosthorn's library was the first substantial collection of Chinese language materials. Secondly Rosthorn's solid foundation in classical philology and in reference materials did qualify him for the (unpaid) job as a teacher and researcher at the university very well, and he took his teaching position more serious than anyone before him. He was able to invite scholars like Bernhard Karlgren, Wolfram Eberhard, Paul Pelliot, Carl Hintze and others for talks in Vienna (p. 101). Thirdly Rosthorn taught successful students, some of whom became well known in the field of Asian studies, such as Gustav Haloun,³ August Conrady, Felix Slavik (Japanese Studies) and others. (The institutional situation in Vienna being as it was at the time led to nearly all of these students leaving Austria during Rosthorn's lifetime.⁴) This in sum should be considered as a very solid foundation for establishing a chair for Chinese studies, which—for various reasons hinted at in Führer's text—was only realized more than thirty years later.

As far as Rosthorn's wide range of research interests and publications are concerned, they are dealt with in detail in this chapter in the way described above, citing his own standpoints as well as the reactions of the international scholarly community of the time. A special feature of this chapter is the care Führer takes in balancing statements praising Rosthorn's scholarly achieve-

3 There are extra short chapters on some of Rosthorn's students in a later section, see e.g. the one on Haloun on pp. 231-234, Joseph Kalmer on pp. 235-241, and on Erwin Reifler on pp. 245-265.

4 There is a brief discussion of some of Rosthorn's students on pp. 116-119. One of them, Franz Joseph Meier was obviously instructed by his teacher to prepare a *Gramatik des Altchinesischen*, which Rosthorn had nearly finished, for publication. It was never published, but Führer in his painstaking research found the notes of an interview with Meier, conducted in December 1976, in the archive of the Ludwig Boltzmann-Institut für China- und Sudostasienforschung (Vienna). In this interview it is clarified that the grammar of Rosthorn was largely based on the first grammar of classical Chinese by a Chinese author, Ma Jianzhong's *Ma shi wentong*, which was published at the turn of the 20th century. I have worked and published on this influential grammar of Ma Jianzhong without knowing about this material. I have to thank Bernhard Führer for this indirect information about an archival source around the corner.

ment with critical reviews of his works. This way the book avoids the pitfalls of hagiographic components which quite often creep into overviews of “national” histories of a discipline, staying strictly within the limits of a critical evaluation within an international context.⁵

4. Final remarks

There are of course mistakes, omissions, misprints and such in a book of this length. I do not want to deal with these; I am instead inclined to say that this is a very carefully edited work for which the author and the responsible editors, which Führer mentions in the preface, are to be congratulated. As to the mentioned lack of ordered biographical data, I would prefer to have them in the beginning of each chapter, very rudimentary, but systematic. It would not take much space and would be a helpful reference. One might argue though that Führer’s book is not the first one trying to detail Austrian-Chinese contacts through history, including the scholarly undertakings, and Führer does not wish to repeat stories already told. I am referring to a large volume by Gerd Kaminski and Else Unterrieder: *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*,⁶ published in 1980. Much more ordered biographical data on many scholars dealt with in Führer’s book are given in this massive volume.

Concerning this book *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*, Führer on the one

5 There is an appendix to the chapter on Rosthorn giving the text of a review of Rosthorn’s *Geschichte Chinas* (published 1923) by Erwin von Zach (pp. 120-123). Führer found a copy of this text in the archive of the University of Vienna, the text was originally published in “Deutsche Wacht” in 1926. The appendix gives the full text by pointing out in a short introduction that it has to be read in the context of the strained relationship between Zach and Rosthorn on the one hand, and within the context of a possibly overemphasized respect for Rosthorn and his achievements in Austria on the other hand. This is a good example of Führer’s attempt, to make available the reactions of a wide spectrum of the scholarly community, friends as well as foes, and at the same time alerting the reader to the pitfalls of these scholarly discussions.

6 Kaminski, G./ E. Unterrieder: *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*, Wien u.a., Europa Verlag 1980 (Berichte des Ludwig Boltzmann-Instituts für China- und Sudostasienforschung 13).

hand often refers to it in his text, on the other hand there is a short evaluation on p. 304, where the author criticizes a certain one-sidedness of the approach without further elaborating on it. On this point Führer does not live up to his otherwise highly recommendable and successful practice of listening to and quoting from different scholarly reactions and reviews of a text. *Von Österreichern und Chinesen* has won high praise in its own right from an other competent reviewer⁷ as a comprehensive account of the history of the relationship between Austria and China. It is a pity that Führer does not quote this review of Walravens's on p. 304. Führer does have all together fourteen texts of Walravens's in his bibliography (including the one on *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*), testifying to the great importance of this specialist on bibliographical and other questions.

In any case *Vergessen und verloren* approaches the subject of Austrian Chinese studies in an very different way, and Führer's book therefore can only be called a most welcome new look at the history of the discipline in Austria. Its encompassing nature, its painstaking research of details, and its way of having the scholarly community evaluate its own products, with the author guiding the reader to appreciate the different facets of this discourse, makes the text most definitively a statement on this question, which will not be superseded easily.

7 Walravens H. (Rez.): "Gerd Kaminski, Else Unterrieder: *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*." In: *Nachrichten der (Deutschen) Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 135 (1984): 65-68.