

China and the World – the World and China

Volume I

Transcultural Perspectives on Pre-modern China

Edited by Joachim Gentz



China and the World – the World and China

Essays in Honor of Rudolf G. Wagner

Edited by
Barbara MITTLER,
Joachim & Natascha GENTZ
and Catherine Vance YEH

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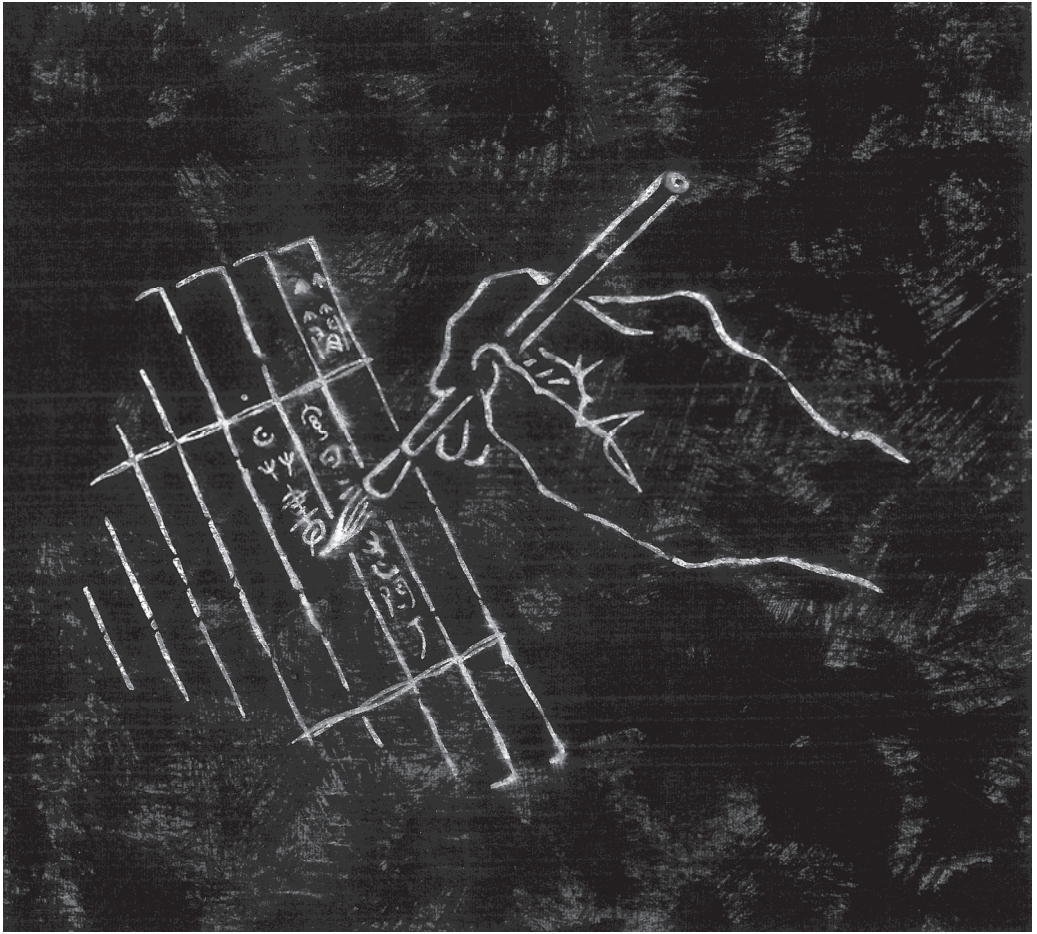
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Volume 1

Transcultural Perspectives on Pre-modern China

Edited by
Joachim GENTZ



Das Alte China (Namy KIM)

Table of Contents

Volume 1: Transcultural Perspectives on Pre-modern China

Das Alte China (Nanny KIM)

FOREWORD	IX
The Joys of Transculturality – or Research and Teaching between China and the World: A Tribute to Rudolf G. Wagner (Monica JUNEJA and Barbara MITTLER)	
Editor's Introduction (Joachim GENTZ)	XV
<i>Every Day Is a Good Day (Carma HINTON)</i>	
Zhuangzi's Twinkle and Methods without Truth (Joachim GENTZ)	1
Materialität antiker Handschriften: Beispiele aus China (Enno GIELE)	25
Concepts of "Authenticity" and the Chinese Textual Heritage in Light of Excavated Texts (Anke HEIN)	37
<i>Interpretation aufschwankendem Grund 1 (Nanny KIM)</i>	
Biographical Genres and Biography: The Case of Yan Zun 嚴遵 (CHEN Zhi)	67
The Rule of Law in Eastern Han China: Some Cases of Murder, Suicide, Theft, and Private Dispute (Robin D. S. YATES)	83
Zhao Qi 趙岐 and Late Han Pedantic Conceptual Analysis (Christoph HARBSMEIER)	107
<i>Interpretation aufschwankendem Grund 2 (Nanny KIM)</i>	
Antlers? Or Horns? Towards Understanding Gan Bao 干寶, the Historian (Michael SCHIMMELPFENNIG)	121
Kumārajīva's "Voice"? (Michael RADICH)	131
<i>Emptiness 1 (Nanny KIM)</i>	
Transcending Boundaries: Afterlife Conceptions in Entombed Epitaphs and Votive Steles of the Six Dynasties' Period (Friederike ASSANDRI)	149
Motifs Traveled with Intentions: Mapping Tang China and the World through Pictorial Screens in Nara Period Japan (710–794) (WANG Yizhou)	171
<i>Emptiness 2 (Nanny KIM)</i>	
Studying Fears of Witchcraft in Traditional China: A Close Reading of Three Examples from Hong Mai's <i>The Records of a Listener</i> (Barend TER HAAR)	203
<i>Chi</i> 癡, <i>pi</i> 癖, <i>shi</i> 嗜, <i>hao</i> 好: Genealogies of Obsession in Chinese Literature (LI Wai-ye))	213
Entangled Histories: Insights Gained from a Hodological Approach to the <i>Blue Beryl's</i> Thanka on Metaphors of the Body (Elisabeth HSU)	233
<i>Emptiness 3 (Nanny KIM)</i>	
Manchu Sources and the Problem of Translation (Mark ELLIOTT)	251
Kalmyk Echoes, Torghut Returns: Poet-Exiles in a Time of Shrinking Frontiers (Haun SAUSSY)	265

Volume 2: Transcultural Perspectives on Late Imperial China

Die späte Kaiserzeit China (Nanny KIM)

Editors' Introduction (Natascha GENTZ and Catherine Vance YEH)	IX
--	----

Kommunikationsknoten 1 (Nanny KIM)

Kim Chǒng-hŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856): A Late Chosŏn Korean Yangban 兩班 in Qing China (Benjamin A. ELMAN)	1
---	---

Early Protestant Historiography and the Travel of Some European “National Characters” to China: Karl F.A. Gützlaff's <i>Gujin wanguo gangjian</i> 古今萬國綱鑑 (1838) (Federica CASALIN)	23
--	----

Para/Texts and the Construction of Life Histories in Women's Literary Collections in Late Imperial China: The Case of Chen Yunlian 陳蘊蓮 (ca. 1800–ca. 1860) (Grace S. FONG)	39
--	----

Kommunikationsknoten 2 (Nanny KIM)

Shanghai as Entertainment: The Cultural Construction and Marketing of Leisure, 1850–1910 (Catherine Vance YEH)	51
---	----

从戏剧到演说——晚清画报中的声音 (CHEN Pingyuan 陈平原)	91
--------------------------------------	----

視覺奇觀與權力地理——《點石齋畫報》緬甸的空間政治與文化敘事 (CHENG Wen-huei 鄭文惠)	109
--	-----

Kommunikationsknoten 3 (Nanny KIM)

The Pitfalls of Transnational Distinction: A Royal Exchange of Honors and Contested Sovereignty in Late Qing China (Elisabeth KASKE)	137
---	-----

Medical Translation in Canton, 1850–1918 (Ellen WIDMER)	171
---	-----

Kant in China: Eine philosophische Wahlverwandtschaft (Joachim KURTZ)	181
---	-----

Kommunikationsknoten 4 (Nanny KIM)

Ying Lianzhi: A Journalist Misfit Negotiating the Founding of the Tianjin <i>Dagongbao</i> (Natascha GENTZ)	201
--	-----

Shandong, the Yellow River, the Local and the Global (Iwo AMELUNG)	229
--	-----

從華夷之「辨」到華夷之「變」——華語語系研究再思考 (David WANG 王德威)	259
--	-----

Volume 3: Transcultural Perspectives on Modern China

Das moderne China (Nanny KIM)

Editors' Introduction (Barbara MITTLER and Natascha GENTZ)	IX
--	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 1 (Nanny KIM)

Is There a Common Reader in This Text? Understandings of Cholera in Daily-Use Compendia (Joan JUDGE)	1
---	---

Useful New Knowledge for Everyone to Digest? Transcultural Remakings of the Encyclopedic in the <i>Encyclopedic Dictionary of New Knowledge</i> (<i>Xin wenhua cishu</i> 新文化辭書, Shanghai 1923) (Barbara MITTLER)	25
---	----

<i>Xin wenhua cishu</i> (<i>An Encyclopedic Dictionary of New Knowledge</i>): An Exploratory Reading (Leo Ou-fan LEE)	41
--	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 2 (Nanny KIM)

Betting on a Cardinal Virtue: Transcultural Formations in Shanghai Finance (Bryna GOODMAN)	55
---	----

Cultural Imperialism Redux? Reassessing the Christian Colleges of Republican China (Elizabeth J. PERRY and Hang TU)	69
--	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 3 (Nanny KIM)

The Emergence of the Modern Civil Engineer in China, 1900–1940 (Pierre-Étienne WILL)	91
---	----

Steaming Toward the Future: Cao Ming, Locomotive, and Transcultural Socialism (Nicolai VOLLAND)	111
--	-----

<i>Waiguo Qiaomin</i> : A Few Comments on the CCP's Policy Toward Foreigners in the Late 1940s (Flavia SOLIERI)	121
--	-----

Wörter ohne Schrift 4 (Nanny KIM)

The South China Sea and How It Turned into “Historically” Chinese Territory in 1975 (Johannes L. KURZ)	133
---	-----

Beijing Water 1908–2008: The Development of China's Capital as Seen through the Lens of Its Most Elusive Resource (Thomas HAHN)	161
--	-----

Wörter ohne Schrift 5 (Nanny KIM)

Xi Jinping and the Art of Chrono-Ideological Engineering (Heike HOLBIG)	183
---	-----

Innovationsrhetorik chinesischer Prägung: Eine Analyse der Rede Xi Jinpings vom 9. Juni 2014 vor der Chinesischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Peking (Christian SCHWERMANN)	201
--	-----

Volume 4: Transcultural Perspectives on Global China

China und Europa (Nanny KIM)

Editors' Introduction (Barbara MITTLER and Catherine Vance YEH)	IX
---	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 6 (Nanny KIM)

是享受、还是忍受“形单影只” – 比较视野中的“孤独”问题 (LIU Dong 刘东)	1
The Quest for Chinese Tea (Dietmar ROTHERMUND)	13

Wörter ohne Schrift 7 (Nanny KIM)

Einige Gedanken zu Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft in China und dem Westen (Helwig SCHMIDT-GLINTZER)	29
---	----

China in Global Context: An Alternative Perspective on World History (Paul A. COHEN)	41
--	----

Why is Esperanto so Popular in Japan? The Case of Shimada Kenji (Joshua FOGEL)	53
--	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 8 (Nanny KIM)

Another China. Representations of China and the Chinese in European Comics and Graphic Novels (Michael LACKNER)	61
--	----

Lost in Transhimalayan Transculturality. Opium, Horses and an Englishman between China, Tibet and Nepal (Axel MICHAELS)	79
--	----

Karl Marx's Critique of Religion and Christian Theology (Michael WELKER)	89
--	----

Wörter ohne Schrift 9 (Nanny KIM)

The Expansive Scholar (Perry LINK)	99
------------------------------------	----

汉学界的“广大教主” – 我眼中的瓦格纳先生 (XIA Xiaohong) 夏晓虹	101
---	-----

Der Meister der Bonmots: Eher eine freundliche Polemik als ein giftiger Essay zur Frage der Sinologie als Wissenschaft (Wolfgang KUBIN)	105
--	-----

Rudolf Wagner and the Taiping Rebellion: A “Culturalistic” Approach (Jan ASSMANN)	111
--	-----

Rudolf G. Wagner's Photographic Memory (Nara DILLON)	115
--	-----

Sequoia in the Sierra Nevada, California, 1963 (Mark ELVIN)

A Handful of <i>Haiku</i> (Mark ELVIN)	119
--	-----

Moving Mountains: Of Foolish Old Men Who Want to Move Mountains – Berge versetzen: Von verrückten alten Männern, die Berge versetzen wollen – 愚公移山 (Barbara MITTLER)	127
--	-----

Two Images from Mount Tai, in Homage to Rudolf Wagner (Lothar LEDDEROSE)	133
--	-----

Wörter ohne Schrift 10 (Nanny KIM)

APPENDIX

List of Publications by Rudolf G. Wagner	139
--	-----

Of Sun, Moon and Stars: Con-/Traversing China and the World in Salon Style – in place of a Tabula Congratulatoria (Barbara MITTLER)	149
--	-----

Cover Image: Yang Jiechang's <i>Mountains and Rivers so Beautiful</i> (<i>Country of Movements 1949–2019</i>)	153
--	-----

FOREWORD

The Joys of Transculturality – or Research and Teaching between China and the World: A Tribute to Rudolf G. Wagner

Monica JUNEJA and Barbara MITTLER

The problem lies perhaps in squeezing the lived reality of life into rigid frames like ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘religion’ [...]. These frames set artificial limits on what people actually think and do; worse still, people come to believe in them and they even sometimes reinvent their lives to fit the frame. (Amitav Ghosh)

From the philosophy and philology of the *Laozi* (4th century B.C.) to the politics of secrecy in China in the 21st century, from early media history, which began in China in the 19th century as an import from Scotland to the use of bio-gas in rural China after “Liberation” – these are only a few facets of the work of Rudolf G. Wagner, Sinologist and Leibniz Prize winner, known in China – and far beyond – for his prolific scholarship and stupendous knowledge. The range of Rudolf Wagner’s research is impressively wide in terms not only of its chronological scope, but also its rich subject matter and geographical expanse. More importantly, he continues to figure as an influential thinker in the field of Transcultural Studies, practiced at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS), which has emerged from the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”, founded by Rudolf Wagner in 2007, together with indologist Axel Michaels and historian Madeleine Herren-Oesch. His work will be continued at CATS, the Centre for Asian Studies and Transcultural Studies, launched in the summer of 2019, in a beautifully executed complex of buildings, arranged as an ensemble around a new Research Library on the old University Campus Bergheim – quite in keeping with the spirit of Rudolf Wagner.

Rudolf Wagner’s research is pioneering in several respects: His extensive scholarship has been part of what can be described as a “transcultural turn” in the Humanities, an approach that has made Heidelberg a vibrant research center over the past decade. Not only did the transcultural perspective that undermined the nexus between the nation state and culture lead to a new reflection on questions to be asked and methods deployed, it necessitated a move to transform institutional structures where traditional scholarship has been entrenched. Rudolf Wagner has always voiced the conviction that institutions require more than star scholars – they need the right infrastructure and a research environment for intellectual creativity to flourish. This inspired his mission as he, to use his favorite expression, took “janitorial care” of the Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence. Thanks to his dynamic leadership, new forms of research collaboration between the so-called Regional/Area Studies and the “mainstream disciplines” were developed at the Cluster, a perspective that has informed the idea of CATS, where the conditions to carry forward such collaborative projects are present from the start. As stubborn institutional boundaries between individual area studies and those separating them from the mainstream disciplines have been discarded as unproductive, it is hardly conceivable now, at the HCTS and in CATS, to research any world region designated as an “area” without teasing out its connections across scales and boundaries – indeed without questioning the frameworks within which those boundaries were instituted in the first place.

Under Rudolf Wagner's inspiring intellectual leadership, we set out to investigate the hypothesis that transculturality, i. e. the transformative workings of cultural interaction over extended spans of time, must be seen as the norm rather than the exception in human societies, long before the advent of global capital and modern media connectivity. Rudolf Wagner set the example through his own research which carried the above postulate from a purely programmatic assertion at a meta-level to the thicket of detailed research, the results of which are available in numerous publications on a range of themes centered on China and the world – the use of metaphors to describe the agency of the nation, the workings of the the press, encyclopedias or film. His publications frequently bring alive the main actors of the transcultural worlds he investigates: sometimes he calls them “barbarians”, sometimes “walking niches”, sometimes “cultural brokers”.¹ His ceaseless productivity where stunning breadth goes hand in hand with rich detail has demonstrated in the most effective way the enormous potential of transculturality for research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. This rich harvest has inspired discussions in domains far beyond Sinology, and in Germany and the world. The best testimony is offered by Rudolf Wagner's numerous students and colleagues, inspired, encouraged and actively helped on by him – many of them contributors to this volume – who teach and research in a wide variety of disciplines, from assyriology to theology to literary studies, from history to musciology, from archaeology, to political science, from intellectual to art history.

Rudolf Wagner's academic career began in Classical Sinology, but he started off, immediately, with a transcultural question, with a work on the transformation of Buddhism in China. His dissertation *Die Fragen Hui-yuans an Kumārajīva* (Munich 1969) deals with a dazzling transcultural figure, Kumārajīva, the first translator of Buddhist writings from Sanskrit into Chinese (and Michael Radich, in volume 1 of this collection, begins a dialogue with this early piece of writing). Now published in three volumes, Rudolf G. Wagner's habilitation then took on the most famous of Laozi's 老子 Chinese commentators, Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249).² Wagner reconstructs Wang's *Laozi* text and illustrates his craft as a scientific commentator who is also a philosopher himself, by placing Wang's work in the context of competing commentaries. He shows how differently the *Laozi* could be read and how Wang Bi now tries to read the *Laozi* only from within, without imposing an agenda on the text. This work has inspired many of the essays in volume 1 of this collection).

In his next monograph, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley 1984), Wagner takes on a group of Chinese rebels who, following a doctrine of salvation brought to China by Protestant missionaries, had created their own vision of China as the kingdom of God and of Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864), their leader, as Jesus' younger

1 “Staatliches Machtmonopol und Alternative Optionen: Zur Rolle der ‚Westlichen Barbaren‘ im China des 19. Jahrhunderts” (The Discretionary Monopoly of the State and Alternative Options: The Role of the “Western Barbarians” in Nineteenth Century China), in: *Traditionale Gesellschaften und Europäischer Kolonialismus*, ed. by J. H. Grevemeyer (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981), 105-136. Twenty articles on Chinese Sociologists in: *Internationales Soziologenlexikon*, vol. 2, ed. by W. Bernsdorf and H. Knosp (Stuttgart: Enke, 1984). “Liu Binyan oder der Autor als wandelnde Nische”, in: *Moderne Chinesische Literatur*, ed. by W. Kubin (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 430-446. “The Philologist as Messiah: Kang Youwei's 1902 Commentary on the Confucian Analects”, in: *Disciplining Classics: Altertumswissenschaft als Beruf*, ed. by G. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 143-168.

2 Vol. 1. R. G. Wagner. *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2000); vol. 2. R. G. Wagner. *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2003); vol. 3. R. G. Wagner. *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2003).

brother. This vision was so successful that, for several years, it weakened the Qing government, already shaken by the opium wars against the Western powers. Wagner's reading remains innovative to the present day as the short essay by Jan Assmann in volume 4 highlights: by bringing the enlightenment experience of Hong Xiuqian to the fore, it enables the reader to dive directly into the mental framework of time.

The book on the Taipings was followed by a series of monographs on Chinese literature in the People's Republic of China – including *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies* (Berkeley, 1990) and *Inside a Service Trade. Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). Again, these books situate China's cultural heritage in a broader context and study connections with the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern Bloc, as well as those between Europe, Japan, Korea and China, and here again and again the tricky question of asymmetries and, as he called it, “catch-up modernization” is posed.³ Many of the essays in volume 2, 3 and 4 of this collection take their cue from these publications.

They are followed by a whole stream of influential works on the early Chinese press, and on Chinese encyclopedias – always in a global context,⁴ and a study on modern reconfigurations of notions of the past, the “classical” and the national heritage that explores China alongside India, Egypt, Iran, and the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds.⁵ A study of film as medium during the Cultural Revolution is now in print, while the long-awaited biography of the Scottish businessman Ernest Major, who, in 1872, published Shanghai's most influential daily newspaper, the *Shenbao* 申報 appears to be in the making.⁶

Rudolf Wagner has taught, researched and published in all of the domains that later would become the four major research areas of the Cluster and the HCTS. As Director of the Cluster, he has inspired and supervised a large number of research projects and has stimulated and participated in countless workshops and conferences always as a very special, keen, bold and demanding interlocutor, insisting on an open and friendly but at the same time, daring, even antagonistic transcultural dialogue. His widespread research interests were communicated to his colleagues and

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- 3 Important writings in the area of literary studies are: “Der Moderne Chinesische Untersuchungsroman”, in: *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 21, ed. by J. Hermand (Wiesbaden: Athenaeum, 1979), 361-407. “Lobby Literature: The Archaeology and Present Functions of Science Fiction in the People's Republic of China”, in: *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society 1978–1981*, ed. by J. Kinkley (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985), 17-62. “Life as a Quote from a Foreign Book. Love, Pavel, and Rita”, in: *Das andere China. Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by H. Schmidt-Glintzer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 463-476. “Constructions of May Fourth”, in: *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital. China's May Fourth Project*, ed. by M. Doleželová-Velingerová and O. Král (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 66-122. “Nachholende Modernisierung. Thesen zur neuen chinesischen Literatur”, in: *Der Fischer Weltatlas: China*, ed. by V. Ullrich and G. Blume (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005).
- 4 R. G. Wagner (ed.). *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2007). R. G. Wagner and M. Doleželová-Velingerová (eds.). *Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge (1870–1930)* (Heidelberg / Berlin: Springer, 2014).
- 5 R. G. Wagner and S. C. Humphreys (eds.). *Modernity's Classics* (Heidelberg / Berlin: Springer, 2013).
- 6 “Staatliches Machtmonopol und Alternative Optionen: Zur Rolle der ‚Westlichen Barbaren‘ im China des 19. Jahrhunderts” (The Discretionary Monopoly of the State and Alternative Options: The Role of the “Western Barbarians” in Nineteenth Century China), in: *Traditionale Gesellschaften und Europäischer Kolonialismus*, ed. by J. H. Grevemeyer (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981), 105-136. Twenty articles on Chinese Sociologists in: *Internationales Soziologenlexikon*, vol. 2, ed. by W. Bernsdorf and H. Knosp (Stuttgart: Enke, 1984). “Liu Binyan oder der Autor als wandelnde Nische”, in: *Moderne Chinesische Literatur*, ed. by W. Kubin (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 430-446. “The Philologist as Messiah: Kang Youwei's 1902 Commentary on the Confucian Analects”, in: *Disciplining Classics: Altertumswissenschaft als Beruf*, ed. by G. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 143-168.

students in the seminars and research groups he led, and accordingly, they are reflected in this four-volume collection: in the area of Historicities and Heritage (Research Area D), he led a research group called “Text and Commentary” which inspired many of those who write in volume 1 of this collection, but also those working in areas such as the establishment of a “modern” historiography since the late Qing (and here, his inspiration can be seen, above all, in Volume 3).⁷ Countless of his publications fall into a completely different field, named Health and Environment and later Knowledge Systems (Research Area C) in the Cluster, where characteristically his own interests arranged themselves in wide, seemingly erratic, but actually quite consecutive, circles of life-prolonging drugs, biogas, sinopsychology and imperial dreams in relation to the Cluster and the HCTS.⁸ The essays by Thomas Hahn, Pierre-Étienne Will, Heike Holbig, Li Wai-yee and Elisabeth Hsu in volumes 1 and 3 of our collection point to his lasting influence and inspiration in this direction.

The “Development of a Public Sphere in China” (the Counterpart to Research Area B Public Spheres in the Cluster/HCTS) was the name of a second, very large research group that was founded in the mid-1990s and from which we have also gathered a whole series of contributions in Volumes 2 and 3.⁹ Rudolf G. Wagner has also published in the area of Governance and

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- 7 “Wang Bi’s Recension of the *Laozi*”, *Early China* 14 (1989), 27-54. “Die Unhandlichkeit des Konfuzius” (The Unwieldiness of Confucius), in: *Weisheit*, ed. by A. Assmann (Munich: Fink, 1991), 455-464. “Importing a ‘New History’ for the New Nation: China 1899”, in: *Historization – Historisierung*, in: *Aporematia: Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte*, vol. 5, ed. by G. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 275-292. “Shinmatsu Shanghai ni okeru Chugoku shinbun sokan to kodai Chugoku no seiken tachi” 清末上海における中国語新聞創刊と古代中国の聖賢たち (The Sages of Chinese Antiquity and the Establishment of Chinese-language Newspapers in Late Qing Shanghai), *Intelligence* (Tokyo), 5 (Jan. 2005), 14-24. “The Language of Heaven”, in: *Reading the Signs: Philology, History, Prognostication Festschrift for Michael Lackner*, ed. by I. Amelung and J. Kurtz (Munich: iudicium, 2018), 97-126.
- 8 “Lebensstil und Drogen im chinesischen Mittelalter (Life Style and Drugs in Medieval China)”, *T’oung Pao* 69 (1973), 79-178. “Soziale und technische Faktoren für die Verbreitung von Biogasanlagen in der VR China” (Social, and technical factors in the spread of the use of biogas in the PRC), *Der Tropenlandwirt*, Beiheft no. 13 (1980), 134-154. “Das Han-shi Pulver, eine Moderne Droge im Mittelalterlichen China” (The Han-shi Powder, a Modern Drug in Medieval China), in: *Rausch und Realität, Drogen im Kulturvergleich*, ed. by G. Völger and K. von Welck (Cologne: Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, 1981), vol. 2, 549-556. “Mineraldünger, Pestizide und die Sicherung hoher langfristiger Erträge” (Mineral fertilizer, pesticides, and the securement of high and stable harvests), in: *Umweltpolitik in China: Modernisierung und Umwelt in Industrie, Landwirtschaft und Energierzeugung*, ed. by B. Glaeser (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1983), 177-250. “Biogasnutzung in ländlichen und städtischen Regionen” (Uses of Biogas in rural and urban environments), in: *ibid.*, 365-394. “Imperial Dreams in China”, in: *Psycho-Simology. The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture*, ed. by C. Brown (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1987), 11-24. “Can we speak of East/West ways of knowing?”, *Know* 2.1 (2018), 31-46.
- 9 (with Catherine Vance Yeh). “A Dry and Factual Account of Things Witnessed or Heard Firsthand from Other Witnesses”, in: *China’s Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989*, ed. by S. Ogden, K. Hartford, L. Sullivan, and D. Zweig (Armonk: Sharpe, 1992), 413-423. “The Role of the Foreign Community in the Chinese Public Sphere”, *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), 423-443. “The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere”, *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1.1 (2001), 1-34. “Jinru quanqiu xiangxiang tuijin: Shanghai de Dianshizhai huabao” 進入全球想象圖景: 上海的點石齋畫報 (Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhai huabao*), *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術 8 (=2001.4), 1-96. “Shenbaoguan zaoqi de shuji chuban” 申報館早期的書籍出版 (The Early Publishing Activities of the Shenbaoguan), in: *Wan Ming yu wan Qing: Lishi chuancheng yu wenhua chuanguan* 晚明與晚清—歷史傳承與文化創新 (The Late Ming and the Late Qing: Historical Dynamics and Cultural Innovation), ed. by Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, Wang Dewei 王德威, and Gao Wei 高偉 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu, 2002), 169-178. “Öffentlichkeit und öffentliche Meinung”, in: *Das*

Administration (Research Area A),¹⁰ working on concepts, such as “work” (which, as we all know, he appreciates so much),¹¹ institutions of the most diverse kind and colour,¹² and practices of memory and propaganda.¹³

Clearly, he has been thinking and roaming in many areas and languages, a tradition that is continued in this multilingual collection. This breadth of horizon is also evident in *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* (open access), which enjoys global resonance today, in its 10th year of publication. The journal has been Rudolf Wagner’s brain child and continues to be edited by him

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today, together with a team of colleagues. After ten years it has become apparent that the trans-cultural paradigm needs to be extended to address the agency of “more-than-human” factors in shaping the field of culture – factors that are embedded in physical and biological environments, but also in technology and the material and virtual worlds. Challenges of the present that have brought with them lively debates within the social and the natural sciences about no less than the future of humanity itself have meant that we critically reflect on the overwhelmingly anthropocentric premises that underlie our scholarly practice. Rudolf Wagner was once more among those to lead the way by setting a bold example: he has argued for the need to engage seriously with theories of bio-social becoming, with the dynamics of the ontogenetic developmental system wherein cultural forms arise in conjoint activity with the non-human, as part of what Tom Ingold describes as an “all-embracing matrix of relationships” that are mutually conditioning. Such boldness is not mere bravado – it has been accompanied by a clear exposition of the challenges confronting an agenda of such ambition that involves delving into historical depths and across temporal scales. One of the daunting challenges emerges when we seek to explain phenomena played out at a familiar local or regional level where a threat ensues on another scale, whose sources might be located in the “big environment”, or even be unknown. Meeting such a challenge requires that scholars of the Humanities collaborate across disciplines, to familiarize themselves with and respond to the findings of climatologists, geologists or geographers. Rudolf Wagner has set the example by actually doing so – he has been over the recent years and months adding to his erudition by interacting with scholarship in the natural and physical sciences, by familiarizing himself with research findings in bio-archaeology and environmental sciences and urging us to do the same. His motto: the best research requires leaving your comfort zone and making for the uncharted seas!

As an intellectual, Rudolf Wagner continues to hold courage to be the lifeline of scholarship. He has served as a role model in an age of rising xenophobia and the concomitant erosion of a particular culture of self-reflexive argumentation that only the Humanities can provide a society with. Learning from history shows that intellectuals, too, were a fractured community whose members did not always chose the same ethical side of a political divide. Be it censorship or political repression – taking a public stance becomes as much of a responsibility, inseparable from our role as producers of knowledge and shapers of institutional life. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to this volume in such a manner that we can actually present Rudolf Wagner with these four volumes. And we would like to thank Rudolf himself, to whom these four volumes are dedicated – even if we say (quoting from a recent opera performance he took us to): “Ceci n’est pas une Festschrift.” For writing these contributions has allowed each of us to reflect once again on what he has exemplified: the joy of research, of learning, of teaching and sharing, without borders, and – the value of courage.