

OBITUARY

ULRICH UNGER (1930–2006)

Just a week after his 76th birthday, Ulrich Unger, the doyen of Early China studies in Germany, passed away in Münster. Unger was born in Leipzig, the son of a painter and varnisher. Skipping one year during his studies at the König Albert Gymnasium in Leipzig, he entered the University of Leipzig in 1948, where he majored in Egyptian and Chinese, and studied several other Oriental languages such as Sumerian and Sanskrit as minors. After graduation in 1952, he continued his studies in classical sinology to receive a “Dr.phil.” in July 1956 with a dissertation on *The Negatives in the Shijing* (85 pp., unpublished).

He left the German Democratic Republic during the fall of the same year and first became lecturer in the Institute of Linguistics at the University of Freiburg in the Federal Republic, before switching to the Oriental Institute at the same university, where he established, more or less single handedly, the subject of sinology. Unger received his “Habilitation” in 1964 with a monumental study and translation of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and their dating, which remains unpublished.

In 1966 Unger accepted the chair in Sinology at the University of Münster, where he spent the rest of his academic career until retirement a decade ago. In his research he steadily pursued fundamental research in the best 19th century sense of the word, i.e., with the ethos of a stunningly erudite, indefatigable philological polymath, who tried no less than to establish a comprehensive compendium (*Grundriss*) for sinology, much like the great handbooks available in Classical Philology. Many of the results—a nine volume grammar of Classical Chinese, a giant card file dictionary of Classical Chinese, and an encyclopedic dictionary of Chinese antiquity covering everything from philosophical terms to material culture—were partly circulated among colleagues in Germany and elsewhere, but only a fraction was ever formally published. These include, most notably:

Einführung in das klassische Chinesisch [Introduction to Classical Chinese]. 2 vols. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1985

Glossar des klassischen Chinesisch [Glossary of Classical Chinese]. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1989

Rhetorik des klassischen Chinesisch [Rhetoric of Classical Chinese]. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1994

Grundbegriffe der altchinesischen Philosophie: ein Wörterbuch für die klassische Periode [Basic terms of Old Chinese philosophy: a dictionary covering the Classical period]. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000.

Unger was also an extremely prolific writer of short research notes on linguistic, philological, textual, historical and archaeological problems, which were serialized in his *samizdat* circulars entitled *Hao-ku* 好古, a format reminiscent of Boodberg's *Hutian Hanyue Fangzhu* notes, or Kennedy's *Wennti*, but continued over a period spanning four decades and covering hundreds of beautifully executed pages. Most of these and the more formal contributions to journals are listed in the following Festschrift:

Und folge nun dem, was mein Herz begehrt: Festschrift für Ulrich Unger zum 70. Geburtstag. Ed. Reinhard Emmerich, Hans Stumpfheldt, Monique Nagel-Angermann and Enno Giele. 2 vols. Hamburger Sinologische Schriften 8. Hamburg: Hamburger Sinologische Gesellschaft, 2002, 670 pp.

Apart from his genuine interest in virtually *all* ancient languages and written cultures, Unger also studied medieval Chinese poetry, and, occasionally, even read Lu Xun and some other Republican authors. He never visited China during his lifetime, but wrote in a beautiful Chinese calligraphy and pronounced his tones remarkably correctly. Unger was also a semi-professional black and white photographer, who owned one of the largest photo-archives about the city of Venice in the world, which he meticulously documented during many visits. Beyond the stiff manners of the Saxonian gentleman and a sometimes ostentatious disdain for the modern world around him, he had a very subtle sense of humor and an inspiring passion for his research and teaching subjects, which many of his former students describe with boundless admiration. He is survived by his wife and daughter.

Sinology has lost one of its greatest scholars: a true philologist, if there ever was one. 惜乎，吾見其進也，未見其止也！

Wolfgang Behr