

THE EARLY STAGE OF GERMAN INDOLOGY AND SANSKRIT STUDIES¹

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Abstract

In the 1820s, Sanskrit studies in Germany has established its academic status and marked the formal establishment of German Indology. This academic event overlapped with German Romanticism historically, but it could not be regarded simply as “romanticized” Indian studies. By combing the academic history of German Indology at this stage and analyzing the research ideas, research contents and research methods of representative scholars, this paper revealed how the study of Sanskrit has caused the change of language research paradigm, and how this change affected Indology and the Oriental Studies in a wider sense, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of the main features of the first phase of the development of German Indology.

Key Words: German Indology, Sanskrit Philology, Comparative and Historical Linguistics.

The 19th century witnessed a great development of German Orientalism, among which Indian studies was the most remarkable, which not only made

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Germany become the “Sanskrit Empire” and the “second homeland of Sanskrit”, but also made the “comparative” approach one of the most significant research methods in humanities. Indology in the 19th century Germany mainly refers to the study of ancient Indian languages and culture, which can be divided into three stages of development: the first stage started from the 1820s, mainly focused on Sanskrit studies; the second phase began in the 1840s when Vedic literature attracted German scholars’ attention; the third stage succeeded in the 1880s, when Buddhist studies gradually rose in Germany. Germany’s long tradition of Indology finally became an important part of the Western academic system of Asian studies. “Indology, a seemingly marginal discipline, once caused great and profound influence in Europe”². In the European and American countries, the writing method of academic history has changed from the philological studies of the scholar group to the postmodernist hermeneutical criticism of special topics, with Sheldon Pollock³, Reinhold Grünendahl⁴, A. Michaels⁵, Vishwa P. Adluri⁶ being the representatives. In response to the former mode of writing, and especially regarding the “plagiarism” of his predecessor’s writings by Eli Franco⁷, an Indologist at the University of Leipzig, Adluri launched a fierce ethical critique of the professor chairs, institutions and systems of Indology at German universities from the perspective of Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, taking them as results of “organizational bureaucracy”⁸. With the publication of Vishwa P. Adluri’s

² Duan Qing 段晴 (2011): Deguo de Yinduxue Zhichu yu Ji Xianlin Xiansheng de Xueshu Diyun 德国的印度学之初与季羨林的学术底蕴 (The early stage of German Indology and Ji Xianlin’s academic foundation). In *Dunhuang Tulufan Yanjiu* 《敦煌吐鲁番研究》 (*Dunhuang and Tulufan Studies*), vol. 12, pp. 1-14.

³ Pollock, Sheldon (1993): Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj, in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 76-133.

⁴ Grünendahl, Reinhold (2008): Wissenschaftsgeschichte im Schatten postorientalistischer De/Konstruktion, in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*. Vol. 103, No. 4/5, 458-478.

⁵ Michaels, Axel (2004): Wissenschaft als Einheit von Religion, Philosophie und Poesie: Die Indologie als frühromantisches Projekt einer ganzheitlichen Wissenschaft. in *Romantische Wissenspoetik: Die Künste und die Wissenschaften um 1800*. Hrsg: G. Brandstetter/G. Neumann. Würzburg (Stiftung für Romantikforschung 26), S. 325-339.

⁶ Adluri, Vishwa P (2011): Pride and Prejudice: Orientalism and German Indology, in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. 15(3), S. 253-29.

⁷ Franco, Eli (2009): Indologie, in *Geschichte der Universität Leipzig 1409–2009, Vol. 4: Fakultäten, Institute, Zentrale Einrichtungen*. Ed. Ulrich von Hehl, Uwe John, Manfred Rudersdorf, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, pp. 393–406.

⁸ Adluri, Vishwa and Joydeep Bagchee (2019): Adaptive Reuse: Eli Franco, Plagiarism, and the Chair of Indology at Leipzig University. <https://www.academia.edu/38844141> (accessed May 1, 2019).

(2011)⁹ article and Reinhold Grunendahl's (2012)¹⁰ criticism, the latter writing mode caused a controversy of "Indologiestreit"¹¹.

Domestic research on German-Indian studies in China is mainly focused on its influence on the development of Chinese oriental philology, especially in the fields of Central Asian studies, Dunhuang studies, Xixia studies and Buddhist philology, etc. In addition, it is also involved in the introduction of the academic background of Chinese and foreign oriental scholars such as Alexander von Staël-Holstein, Chen Yinke and Ji Xianlin¹². As a result, the tradition of Indian studies at the University of Gottingen in Germany is relatively well known to the domestic scholars¹³, but the introduction of Sanskrit studies at the universities of Berlin, Bonn, Tübingen and Leipzig, other initial forces of the Indological origin in Germany, is less and unsystematically described. Such research status shows an incomplete knowledge system, which limits improving China's academic system of "Orientalism" and strengthening the "South Asia Studies" based on practical problems. It is not conducive to academic exchanges between China with other countries as well. Based on the research status, this paper makes a relatively

⁹ Adluri, Vishwa P (2011).

¹⁰ Grünendahl, Reinhold (2012): History in the Making: On Sheldon Pollock's "NS Indology" and Vishwa Adluri's "Pride and Prejudice", in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 189-257.

¹¹ Poewe, Karla and Irving Hexham (2015): Surprising Aryan Mediations between German Indology and Nazism: Research and the Adluri/Grünendahl Debate, in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 264.

¹² Duan Qing. 2011(12), 1-14; Liu Zhen 刘震(2013): Cong Jimen Chuancheng Guankui Deguo he Zhongguo Yinduxue de Yuanliu 从季门传承管窥德国和中国印度学的源流 (The origin of Indology in Germany and in China from the perspective of Ji's academic tradition), in *New History, Vol. 10: Ancient Science and Modern Civilization*. Edited by Chen Heng, Geng Xiangxin. Zhengzhou: Elephant Press, pp. 202-229; Chen Ming 陈明 (2022): The China Society of Oriental Philology: A Forgotten History Rediscovered, in *Chinese Culture*, No. 55, pp. 173-189; Shen Weirong 沈卫荣 (2021): Tschen Yin Koh and his Studies of Buddhist and Central Asian Philology, in *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, Vol. 36, No.1, pp. 1-15; Zhang Guogang 张国刚 (2012): Chen Yinke Liude Shiqi Bolin de Hanxue yu Yinduxue——Guanyu ChenYinke Xiansheng Zhixue Faolu de Ruogan Beijing Zhishi 陈寅恪留德时期柏林的汉学与印度学——关于陈寅恪先生治学道路的若干背景知识 (Sinology and Indology in Berlin of Tschen Yin Koh's duration —— on some background information about Tschen Yin Koh's academic career), in *International Sinology 《国际汉学》*, No. 2, pp. 86-94; Wu Rujun 吴汝钧 (1983): *Fojiao Yanjiu Fangfalun 《佛教研究方法论》 (Methodology of Buddhist Studies)*. Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju 学生书局, 1983.

¹³ Duan Qing (2011), p. 8; Liu Zhen. 2013: 202-229; Wang Qilong, Deng Xiaoyong 王启龙 邓小咏 (2009): *Ganghetai Xueshu Pingzhu 《钢和泰学术评注》 (An academic review on Alexander von Staël-Holstein)*. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe 北京大学出版社 (Peking University Press), 2009.

complete review of the early development of German Indology, and makes a comprehensive summary of its origin, the main representative figures and research characteristics of the first stage, which will provide reference for the future research in this field.

1. The Origin of German Indology

The link between Germany's interest in India and the development of Romanticism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is undeniable. In addition to contributing his illuminating work¹⁴ to the West, Sir William Jones (1746-1794) also translated Indian classics such as *Laws of Manu*, *Ramayana* and *Sakontala*. Among them, *Sakontala* was translated into German by Georg Forster (1754-1794) in 1790. With a promotional introduction by Friedrich Majer (1772-1818) and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), the drama was quickly spread among the romantic circle with the Schlegel brothers as the core, and Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), the younger of the two brothers, was also deeply affected. By chance, Fr. Schlegel studied Sanskrit in Paris with the Scottish Alexander Hamilton (1762-1824). Not before long Fr. Schlegel's famous *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) officially opened the door to German studies of Indian language and culture. Forster and Fr. Schlegel are credited with establishing Sanskrit Philology in Germany.

1.1 The Population of *Sakontala* among early Romantics

Forster traveled extensively in his early years, while in England he translated from the English version of *Sakontala* (1789) by Sir William Jones into German. He published part of the play in Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805)'s *Thalia* in the summer of 1790, before publishing the full translation in May 1791 as *Sakontala oder der ent scheidende Ring*. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), Friedrich Schlegel (1774-1829), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and even Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) were influenced by this Indian play. In his preface to the second edition (1803), Herder expressed high praise for the work, showing that the Indian elements conveyed in the work were already familiar to the German cultural world¹⁵. The play was also praised by A. W. Schlegel in his 1790 review of a portion published in Schiller's *Thalia*. In the first paragraph of his preface to *Über die*

¹⁴ Jones, William (1807): *The Third Anniversary Discourse, on the Hindus*. Vol. III: 24-46.

¹⁵ McGetchin, Douglas T (2009): *Indology, Indomania and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany*. Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (1808), Friedrich Schlegel argued that the play promoted the desire for more “similar and equally beautiful” Asian productions¹⁶.

Majer made the transition from “early romantic literature” to academic interest in the study of India. He himself was a romantic who had a passion for the new Indian poetry of the time and had delved into Kalidasa’s plays. At that time, in the literary circles of Jenaer and Weimar, the early Romantics around the Schlegel brothers were formed. Majer was associated with them, as well as Goethe and the young Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), and was also a friend to Herder¹⁷. The German Romantics saw the play as depicting the values they advocated for their romantic movement, as both showed “a love for nature, surrender to emotion, exoticism, and religious transcendence”.¹⁸ It was because of Majer’s promotion that “India” and “Indian poetry” were widely disseminated among the early Romantics, especially the Schlegel brothers. Romanticism, non-academic interest in Sanskrit literature and exoticism continued in the 19th century. Works from India were popularized through niche writers such as Adolf Friedrich von Schack and cultural giants such as Heinrich Heine and Richard Wagner. Interest in Sakontala and Fr. Schlegel’s *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* formed the basis of the scholarly study of Sanskrit that was budding since the 1820s. Forster and Fr. Schlegel put Sanskrit philology in Germany on the right track¹⁹.

1.2 Friedrich Schlegel and his *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808)

Since Germany did not directly participate in the colonial activities in India in the 18th century, German scholars learned Sanskrit and conducted research mainly under Britain and French teachers’ instruction, and therefore Paris was also known as the “Mekka” of German Indiology²⁰. In 1803, Fr. Schlegel²¹, the younger of the two brothers, went to Paris to study Persian with Antoine Léonard de Chézy (1718-

¹⁶ McGetchin, Douglas T. (2009), p. 58. Original German: “Die Freunde der Poesie hofften besonders seit der Erscheinung der Sokuntola von daher noch manches ähnliche schöne Gebilde des asiatischen Geistes zu sehen, so wie dieses von Anmuth und Liebe beseelt.” (F. Schlegel, 1808, iii-iv.)

¹⁷ Grünendahl, Reinhold (2015): „Romantische Indomanie“ oder „orientalische Renaissance“? Zu einigen Erklärungsmustern für das Entstehen der Indologie in Deutschland, in *ZDMG*, Vol. 165, No. 1, S. 185–210.

¹⁸ McGetchin, Douglas T.(2009), p. 59.

¹⁹ McGetchin, Douglas T.(2009), p. 75.

²⁰ R. Rocher/L. Rocher (2013): *Founders of Western Indology: August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Henry Thomas Colebrooke in Correspondence 1820–1837*. Wiesbaden 2013 (AKM 84), S. 41.

²¹ It is noticed that the eldest brother Karl August Schlegel (1761-1789) might had initial effect on Fr. Schlegel’s interest in India, see: Y.M (1973): Editorial Comment: The Third Schlegel Brother and the Element of Chance in the History of Linguistics, in *Romance Philology*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 67-68;