On September 6, 2007 Wolfgang Franke, doyen of post-war German Sinology, passed away at the age of 95. He belonged to the generation of sinologists who from the 1950s onward contributed in leading positions to the development of sinology as a professional discipline in academic life. Wolfgang Franke almost from the beginning was an active member of the so-called Junior Sinologues and the European Association for Chinese Studies.

Wolfgang Franke was born on July 24, 1912 in Hamburg as son of Otto Franke, then Professor of Chinese Studies at the Colonial Institute in Hamburg, the forerunner of Hamburg University. Otto Franke, author of the five volumes of the Geschicht des chinesischen Reiches comprising Chinese history from the beginnings until the end of the Yuan Dynasty, held the first sinological chair in Germany. In 1923 the family moved to Berlin where Otto Franke followed J.J.M. de Groot on the sinological chair at the University. There had never been any doubt for the son that he would follow in his father's footsteps. Between 1930 and 1935 Wolfgang Franke studied sinology in Hamburg and Berlin finishing his studies with a PhD thesis on Kang Youwei. After a year of military service he went to China in 1937 where he got a job at the German Institute (Deutschland-Institut) in Peking, an institute that served as a mediator of German culture in China. He was to stay in China until 1950, the last four years as professor at Sichuan University and West China Union University and at Beida. These years in China gave his life the decisive direction: To a large extent he identified himself with Chinese culture and, favoured by his marriage with Hu Chün-yin, adopted a Chinese life style that he maintained as much as possible throughout his life. Two children, a daughter and a son, were born in China before he returned to Germany with his family.

In 1950 Wolfgang Franke took up the position of professor at the Department of Chinese Language and Culture at Hamburg University which he held until his retirement in 1977, only interrupted by a sabbatical at Harvard University (1957/58) and two periods of teaching in Southeast Asia, one of the then few options available to live in a Chinese environment (1963-66 guest professor at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, 1969/70 at Singapore University). Thus it was a matter of course that after his retirement Franke mainly lived in Southeast Asia, most of the time in Kuala Lumpur, returning to Hamburg only during the summer months. He spent his later years engaged in extensive travels in Southeast Asia and China. For the last ten years he lived in Berlin with his daughter taking good care of him.

In his research and lectures Wolfgang Franke focussed on modern China which in the 1950s still was an exception in West Germany. Quite unique at that time, students of sinology in Hamburg started with learning putonghua and only in their second year began studying classical Chinese. In a way this had been a tradition in Hamburg since the time of Otto Franke who never disregarded contemporary Chinese affairs. The son became one of the most pronounced adherents of the view that modern China cannot be understood without taking into account traditional China. In the much discussed question of continuity and change he clearly stressed the former.
His research was devoted to three major fields of interest. The outcomes of the first, the history of modern China since the mid-nineteenth century, were the two works *Das Jahrhundert der chinesischen Revolution 1851-1949* (1958) and *The Reform and Abolition of the Traditional Chinese Examination System* (1960). Ming history was a further research field. It had been his father’s wish that the son would continue the history of the Chinese Empire for the Ming and Qing periods. But as Wolfgang Franke explained in his autobiography *Im Banne Chinas* (2 vols. 1995 and 1999), his concept of China’s history as well as historical method were so different from his father’s that he did not feel in a position to comply with his father’s wish. Yet his preoccupation with Ming history never ceased, as evidenced by several articles and the book *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* (1968). After his retirement he primarily explored Chinese stone inscriptions in Southeast Asia. These explorations resulted in the publication of several volumes on Chinese epigraphic materials in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Throughout his career Wolfgang Franke engaged himself in promoting sinology and especially modern China studies. Not only did he publish several articles on the conditions and problems of China studies in Germany but for years he also served on the boards of the Institute of Asian Affairs in Hamburg and the German Association for Asian Studies. And unless he was in East or Southeast Asia, he always attended the EACS congresses. As to his personality, he was friendly and tolerant, left his students a lot of freedom and abhorred radical positions. To many he may have seemed non-committal, but he did have principles which, however, he did not force on others. In a way, he personified the Confucian virtue of *zhong yong*.

Brunhild Staiger